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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Revenge for a Massacre

MIKE SHAYNE

New Thriller
By BRETT HALLIDAY

The Nude in the Pool

A Mystery Novel
By TOM H. MORIARTY



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BRETT HALLIDAY

A Couple of Mike Shaynes

It's always gratifying to have an expectation confirmed.

Your response to the first installment of the new Mike Shayne serial has been so favorable that we were almost tempted to let the redhead carry the ball completely past the goal line, without adding another word of editorial comment. But it's pretty hard to remain silent when letters of enthusiasm and approval start arriving in the morning mail. Besides, we've never known a fellow-editor who wasn't a little on the talkative side at times and a reticent stand-offishness has never seemed to us an admirable quality in an editor.

We should like to stress again, too, an important departure in our customary policy which we mentioned briefly last month. We felt that the Miami detective's immense popularity justified our running not only one part of a three-part Mike Shayne serial in each issue, but accompanying the second and third installments of the serial with a *complete Shayne adventure of novelet length*.

While we were pretty sure that most of our readers would not object to a temporary suspension of our usual policy in this respect during the course of a serial we did not want a single one of our readers, old or new, to feel even slightly cheated or let down.

So, it is nice to know that after you read the second installment of *THE BODY THAT CAME BACK*, the 47th book-length Mike Shayne, you only have thirty days to wait to complete this great full-length novel. But it is much nicer to know you don't actually have to wait thirty days for a complete Mike Shayne adventure—for, this issue also contains a complete new Mike Shayne caper, *REVENGE FOR A MASSACRE*.

And in the next issue, thirty days from today, you'll have the conclusion of the serial and—as an added bonus—a complete new Mike Shayne novelet. Three complete new Mike Shayne stories in three issues—in a unique fashion befittingly so for a unique private eye.

Leo Margulies
Publisher

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

JANUARY, 1964

Vol. 14, No. 2

NEW SHORT MYSTERY NOVEL

THE NUDE IN THE POOL by TOM H. MORIARTY

The young detective had a studious side to his nature. But the two Hollywood murders made the world of books seem more than a little anemic.

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LEO MARGULIES

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MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE, VOL. 14, No. 2. Published monthly by RENOWN PUBLICATIONS, INC., 160 W. 46th St., N. Y., N. Y. 10036. Subscriptions, 12 issues \$4.00; 24 issues \$7.50; single copies 35¢. Second-class postage paid at New York, N. Y. and at additional mailing offices. Places and characters in this magazine are wholly fictitious. © 1963 RENOWN PUBLICATIONS, INC. All rights reserved. January, 1964. Printed in the United States of America. Postmaster—return 3579 to 160 W. 46th St., N. Y., N. Y. 10036.

THE NUDE IN THE POOL

by TOM H. MORIARTY

A corpse in a trunk and a Hollywood glamor residence tenanted by blonde starlets could keep a young cop on his toes. But Rodriguez had tender calluses.

A THRILLING NEW SHORT SUSPENSE NOVEL

IN THE DARK small hours on a Spring morning in Hollywood, a slender young man with Spanish features crouched like a tense half-back over his homework in the squad room of the Los Angeles Police Department, Division 6, at Wilton and De Longpre avenues.

The homework was not official, as it would have been if he had been merely looking over mugg shots of the wanted. It was personal and went a little beyond the call of duty. Jose Juan Rodriguez, rookie officer of the law, liked his job as plainclothes man very much, and was trying to improve his

qualifications by auditing a psychology class at UCLA.

Rodriguez studied in peace and quiet as the town dozed off in this slot of time between midnight and the sunrise. The freeways were as free of cars and trucks as they ever would be in a day's span. The graveyard shifts at Lockheed and Technicolor and the rest were still on the work ball, and the great tide of the day had not formed.

At 4:57 precisely on the clock's face the quiet and peace was shattered and the voice of duty came abruptly over the squawk box from a monitoring sergeant.



"Rodriguez. Kelly. Car Two on Wilton. Swimming pool accident at Pyracantha Palisades."

In minutes Car Two flashed across Hollywood Boulevard without need of a siren's warning.

"What's Pyracantha?" asked Rodriguez. In sport coat and slacks he looked like some young friend of Kelly's going along for the ride.

"Bachelor set-up for movie would-be's. Young fellows and

girls. Not a cheap place. Big pool. Ritzy layout. No Big Name people. Only newcomers gone Hollywood and good-looking youngsters starting off as extras, with probably somebody back home picking up their tabs."

The hind quarters of the sleeping elephant called Hollywood Mountain showed lighter in the first deep rays of pre-dawn. Vehicle lights on the freeway were a washed-out yellow.

Kelly turned sharp left on Franklin Street and headed for the streets going up into the rise of the Santa Monica Mountains. As the police car wound higher on the twisting street, the Pyracantha complex of terrace apartments and cottages was seen to be fairly near the Bowl, overlooking the neon plain of Hollywood proper and the net of freeway lanes beyond that led to the stone stub of the L.A. City Hall, gilded now by the rising sun.

The setting was in keeping with the aspirations of young people just getting started in Hollywood, Rodriguez told himself. They wanted both a sense of distinction and an insulation. Here was a walled compound, a retreat blocked off from the hilly acres of more established people who had such weighty but prosaic problems as schools for children and shopping centers to take into consideration in their living plans.

A thirtyish-appearing woman with a scared look on her face and wearing a terry robe waited at a low stone wall which marked off the parking area inside the compound.

"There's a body in the pool," she said. Her voice was almost matter-of-fact, but it was clearly costing her an effort to speak calmly.

Rodriguez followed Kelly down a planted terrace to the pool's glassy waters. Its kidney-shaped

curves were backgrounded by a centerpiece statue of a plump Diana with her spear. All in all, it was a setting of luxury and taste.

An object resembling a barkless crotch of a tree could be made out in the depth of the pool.

"Ambulance job," said Kelly. He hurried back to his radio at the car.

"I'm Mrs. Applegate. My husband's the manager," the woman explained to Rodriguez. "I swim every morning. I dove in. It gave me a terrible jolt when I saw what looked like a man down there."

"Did you consider pulling him up?"

"No—I was too terrified."

The help and the whining screech of the police emergency hospital ambulance soon jarred sleep out of some residents of Pyracantha Palisades. The vehicle wheeled in and an attendant with a skin-diver's headpiece and goggles ran to the pool and lowered himself into the water. Kelly had briefed him.

The rubbery body of a nude man came wobbling up to the surface. He was a little fellow, weighing not much more than 125 pounds and well on in years. His crew-cut was patched grey at the ears.

The ambulance expert worked on him with oxygen for a short time, then announced that he was dead for certain, and probably had been for some time.

"It's Art Colman!" Mrs. Applegate exclaimed.

"He lives here?"

The woman nodded. "In Twenty-seven A."

Rodriguez asked Kelly to get a statement from Mrs. Applegate, and then went to terrace apartment 27-A. By now a dozen or more young men and women were nervously hovering in the vicinity of the ambulance. In the crowd was Mr. Applegate. The manager got his keys and opened up the apartment.

It was obvious that a decorator with a woman's viewpoint had been at work here. The layout consisted of one big room and sun verandah with a bathroom attached. Screens split off the wall-to-wall carpeting into a sleeping alcove, a book nook, a motel-like lounge with imitation oriental stone statues and several expensive chairs. The walls were covered with a gold paper on which had been inscribed a sprinkling of Chinese characters in red. The home bar in the lounge hooked up with a big refrigerator and a little stove. On the verandah was a chromium-legged barbecue with motorized spit. A wall-set horizontal cabinet contained TV, radio, hi-fi, and tape recorder.

Rodriguez noted eleven suits, a dozen slacks, more than a hundred ties, and a wide and varied selection of sport coats and accessories in the wardrobe. Personal

letters disclosed that Arthur Colman was indeed the tenant. His business connection was the *Debs, Potter, and Bolling* advertising agency of Detroit.

During Rodriguez's slow examination of the apartment knocks sounded on the door several times and the stir outside grew noisier. The young detective knew it could only mean that the reporters and cameramen had arrived. They were insistent fellows but Rodriguez liked them for the direct way they went at things.

Lieutenant Bennett, his boss, did not share this feeling. Bennett felt that newsmen could almost control a case's development, often with disastrous results, if you took them too completely into your confidence.

"You can come in as far as the pantry," he told the shoving cameramen. "It practically takes in the whole place."

"This may turn out to be a murder, Rodriguez," said a reporter. "Give us a break. We need more than a peek."

Rodriguez told them that he had verified the man's name, and gave his job connection. Then he said: "All right. You can walk to this center point. But don't touch a thing. We haven't dusted for prints yet."

"A boudoir I get before breakfast!" a photographer said in disgust. "I thought you had a corpse."

"You know where the coroner's



office is, buddy," the young detective retorted. "I'm just giving you the break you asked for."

"Okay, okay. We appreciate your hospitality. How about a picture of yourself to go with it—and a word or two we can put in quotes?"

"Not a chance, fellows. I don't want publicity. Save it for the lieutenant."

The bulb went off as he looked up, while leaning over a large oriental vase. The shot cleverly highlighted what little was known of the case at this point: a plush-living bachelor among young movie and TV aspirants in a swanky hillside nest.

Rodriguez did not realize, as did the cameramen, that his classical mold was almost in the lady-killer tradition of the movies and was only saved by a strong flatness in

the set of the eyes. The photogs saw in the calm young dick a welcome asset if the story moved up to front-page prominence.

When Rodriguez returned the keys to Pyracantha manager John Applegate, he found a pool maintenance crew already on the job, starting to empty the water and preparing for a flush-out and scrub-down.

"Those men will have to wait," he said to Applegate. "The pool stays as it is until we get the coroner's report."

Applegate stared at him in astonishment. "You mean it might be more than just drowning?"

"It might be—yes," Rodriguez confirmed. "Do your tenants normally swim in this pool in the nude? His trunks are dry and stashed away in his apartment."

"It has happened before," said Applegate. "The atmosphere does something to people. Some of them go screwball. As a matter of fact, I was put in this job by the owners to screen out the worst kind—the type that used to cause trouble at Pyracantha. Then we began attracting a few solid citizens and Colman certainly looked like one to me. He's an advertising man."

"Would you call him a big wheel?"

"Well, he contacts the studios and has high-class visitors as his guests. His apartment was decorated at a tremendous cost. Maybe he doesn't exactly fit into the act

with all these young geniuses. But he has one thing they haven't."

"And that's money," said Rodriguez, nodding. "Mr. Applegate, the police will want your cooperation if anything develops. Meanwhile—nobody is to get into this apartment. If you run into any beefs, call us at Hollywood station."

II

ON HIS RETURN to the station, Joe Rodriguez found a huddle on in Lieutenant Fred Bennett's office. The coroner's preliminary report showed that death had taken place some hours before the body had been found. Stomach tests showed that powerhouse barbituates had been swallowed.

Rodriguez was promptly assigned to extended time—specifically to check out the advertising agency office on Hollywood Boulevard. A team of fingerprint and case experts had arrived from downtown to work the apartment.

Lieutenant Bennett handled the inquiry calls himself. The calls were starting to come in from Los Angeles, Palm Springs, and Michigan. Radio news had spread the word locally. Telephone calls of interested friends reached the Detroit head office of the ad agency, and messages of shocked inquiry began coming in from the motor capital and a small Michigan place named Stone City, the location of the Vertex Motors factory which

retained the *Debs, Potter, and Bolling* ad agency.

In the life of Jose Juan Rodriguez there had been little contact with the polished world of modern business. The large Mexican-American family in East Los Angeles from which he came moved in more modest circles where muscle and craftwork took precedence as sources of income over the showcasing of brains. He was therefore delighted with an assignment that put him into the center of this scene of management skills.

It was the first really important assignment he'd received since Lieutenant Bennett had picked him out of a personnel grab bag solely because he needed a smooth younger type who would look natural on a somewhat unnatural beat of lobbies, lounges, and tourist lairs.

Shirley Smith, Arthur Colman's secretary at the Los Angeles branch office of the advertising agency, was on the job and extremely busy at the telephone when Rodriguez arrived at the office suite on Hollywood Boulevard. The lights of incoming calls waited on the switchboard as Shirley took call after call and gave swift and subdued explanations of the "accident."

Rodriguez listened and noted that she was constantly saying, "I don't know what that could mean?" He judged that Colman's friends were puzzled by the fact that the

dead man had gone bathing in the nude.

After about ten minutes of waiting, Rodriguez showed his police identification to the switchboard girl and asked her to stop the inflow. It was necessary for him to do some talking of his own with Shirley Smith.

A heavily tanned, tawny blonde with the added attraction of very little make-up looked up at him when he walked into Arthur Colman's office and shut the door behind him. She was evidently accustomed to making the decisions herself and Rodriguez's cut-off put a stiff challenge in her face.

But the casual grace, slimness, and compelling racial poise of handsome young Rodriguez generated another emotion almost immediately, and she let the opposition of her eyes fade away and a look of feminine helplessness take over.

"He was a good swimmer," Shirley Smith told Rodriguez. "I know because he invited me up there several times for pool parties. He was an unusual man. The company sent him out here several years ago to handle the *Vertex* account movie and TV tie-ups."

"You mean—cars in pictures? Commercials?"

"That's right. It led to a lot of contacts in the Palm Springs-Hollywood world. Why are you so concerned with details?"

"It begins to look like a sui-

cide." Rodriguez had no theories of his own at this time. He made the statement to see what the girl's reaction would be. Suicide automatically put her close to the case —much closer than drowning.

"Oh, no! He couldn't have killed himself!" She was too shocked at the suicide idea to speak again for some seconds.

"When we get a possible suicide we go very deeply into the case to find motivation. That's why we must have your help, Miss Smith. Not too many people realize that the smallest detail may be of vital importance in any kind of police work."

She was glad to help. Rodriguez left the office with a list of names and his next stop was the Regional Office of Vertex Motors in Los Angeles. There he asked to see Louis Halliwell, Regional Manager. He switched tactics with Halliwell, informing him that some kind of homicide might be involved and the police were checking out background.

"I was always afraid of that Colman set-up at the Pyracantha," Halliwell said. He was frank-faced and rugged, a man in his early forties. Rodriguez thought it likely that he had some Indian blood in his ancestry, in view of his high cheekbones, glossy black hair, and the piercing intensity of his gaze despite his set, professional-type smile.

Rodriguez pegged him for a

tough customer in his polite field of business, a man who would settle a situation head-on.

"The Pyracantha's an odd-ball place for a business executive to make his home," Halliwell said. "A man could get himself into trouble very easily with all those young fillies around. I know the place quite well. In fact, I've been up there several times."

"What we want from you, sir, and it's in the strictest confidence," said Rodriguez, "is a check-up on some names I have here. People who might tell me a little more about Arthur Colman. Who's this Brad Melnikov?"

"Brad Melnikov worked for the agency until just recently. He resigned for his own reasons. I never could understand why so many ad people walk away from high-salaried jobs. Anyway, he was a top-notch promotion man. Worked fine with our dealers."

That checked with the information Rodriguez had already received from Shirley Smith. He framed his next question carefully. "A Mr. Joseph Walford of Stone City, Michigan, has called the police station. He's the head of the Vertex car factory, isn't he?"

"He's my Number One boss," Halliwell replied. "Art Colman was quite a favorite of Mr. Walford's, I understand. I imagine it was quite a blow to him when he got the tragic news."

"Does Joseph Walford visit the West Coast much?"

"About half a dozen times a year—on business meetings to introduce new programs or pep up our dealers. So far this year he's been out here twice. He stops at the Consular here and occasionally stays at Palm Springs or Phoenix or Pebble Beach for a few days before going home. As a matter of fact, almost every time I've seen the boss taking it easy Colman was with him."

"You feel that Colman was a good fellow—I mean, an ordinary normal business man? No signs of sensational antics. Playboy publicity stuff?"

"Art was okay. A very personable fellow. Oh, he favored the Hollywood crowd and played around nights quite a bit. But I'd say that's par for the course for a bachelor with a comfortable salary."

On the way out, Halliwell paused at his secretary's desk and introduced Karla Noldte to Rodriguez, while asking her to cooperate with the officer on any future requests for Vertex information. The play of humor in the rangy blonde girl's face pleased Rodriguez, so he accepted her sudden invitation to make it a coffee break at her desk.

Since her boss was now back in his office busy at the phone, Rodriguez asked Karla Noldte some of the same questions he had put to

Halliwell. He noted that she said Mr. Walford had been on the West Coast since the first of the year four times, not twice. He also noted that she was direct, positive, and very sure of herself—a woman who would have qualified as much more than a secretary if she had been a man.

Before trying to look up Brad Melnikov, Rodriguez called the station and talked briefly with Lieutenant Bennett. "I've something I'd like you to listen to," Bennett said. "Better hop back here for a moment."

When Rodriguez arrived at the station he saw Kelly getting into a police car at the red-painted curb. "It's heating up, Joe," said Kelly. "Wait till you hear those tapes we found in Colman's cocktail lounge."

Rodriguez hurried into the building and got in on the tail-end of a voice recording that was being re-run. There flowed the gayety of improvised jazz and delighted squeals of women's voices and shouts of men saying encouraging things such as "Hit it, man!" It was a sound-track of fun and frolic.

"Party souvenirs," Lieutenant Bennett said, when the tape ended. "But it only proves that Colman liked to cut up a bit." The veteran looked up, saw Rodriguez and clicked into the mentor role he associated with his protege.

"There was one significant part,

Joe, about arrivals," Bennett said. "You know—everybody greets everybody else with 'Hello Dahlings' at the door! Colman probably used his machine for the old gag of playbacks to surprise his friends. However, there's still plenty work to be done there. Colman was kind of out of place living there, wasn't he?"

Rodriguez nodded. "He must have been Uncle Art to those youngsters."

"Find out what they really thought of him, Joe. Applegate's opinion has no bearing. If Colman had a selfish or sneaky streak in him, he may have made enemies left and right without knowing it. The young people were on the shorts and so their pride would resent somebody older with money to burn."

Rodriguez checked his watch and saw that he had just half an hour to reach his psychology class at UCLA. It was cutting things close to try to get to Westwood through traffic in time.

Lieutenant Bennett said, "Go along. A little thing like duty should not stand in the way of your education, Joe. Bring us back another photo quiz."

Rodriguez laughed. The photo quiz from the psychology class was the standard set of a few dozen mugg shots of teen-age boys in their Sunday suits. Each old-fashioned picture had a number under it. First you chose the three that

you believed had been most successful later on in their lives. Then you checked your choices with the numbered list—and usually discovered with a sheepish grin that your choices had failed miserably and maybe had even ended up in a reform school or prison.

Lieutenant Bennett had placed his best bet on a boy who had turned out to be the prize moron of the lot. He had never gotten past the sixth grade and had disappeared as a tramp.

Rodriguez remembered how at first Lieutenant Bennett had been irritated and had scoffed at the test. Later, his boss had remarked that there was a lesson to be learned from the quiz—to check out everything, and accept nothing at face value.

III

IN THE EVENING Rodriguez took up his duties again. Mrs. Melnikov answered the phone when he dialed the Melnikov number. She told him that her husband was at Lone Pine in Owens Valley with a friend, and going on a pack trip into the Sierras. If the call was important, then the police could fly up after him.

"I don't know what he thinks about the Art Colman drowning," she said. "I don't think he's interested. To tell you the truth, he got a raw deal from those people. It doesn't surprise me that something



terrible happened to Art Colman. He was playing around with Mr. Walford and some twerp women in that Pyracantha. I'm glad Brad's out of it."

Rodriguez assured himself that in the future he would try to talk to more women in his investigation duties—and find out more things the first time around. Women tell you what's in their hearts, he decided. Lieutenant Bennett might have addéd, "When they like you, Joe. When they like your face or your voice or the way you knot a tie."

With an assist from the Sheriff's Office at the highway town of Lone Pine, Rodriguez 'talked' with Brad Melnikov over the teletype soon after. Melnikov evidently was a strong-minded man, Rodriguez guessed, because the answers to his questions came out in plain words. The people to check up on,

he advised if the police suspected something more than a suicide were Inga Swar, a girl who lived alone in the Pyracantha and was trying to break into show business like all the rest; Joseph Walford, known to everyone behind his back as Little Joe, and by some as Little Caesar; Shirley Smith; Louis Halliwell; Karla Noldte; and a singer and comedienne named Fannie Harger.

Miss Harger had played the lead in a compact-size musical show called "The Vertex Revue" which had proved an excellent means of introducing the new model Vertex line of cars to dealers at secret preview performances around the country. She had just played in L.A.

Yes, Melnikov assured the detective, the head of the Vertex Motors was quite interested in show business and the glamor of Hollywood, perhaps more than in the business of making and selling automobiles. He had helped several people work up into Broadway stardom after their connection with the commercial-type shows that he sponsored. He was a highly-paid executive and his hobby was apparently entertainers.

Melnikov was frank to admit that he had become disgusted with the local branch set-up of the ad agency and quit. He could not look forward to buttering up a self-appointed theatrical producer

in order to hold down a job. He was taking a vacation and planned to start in the automobile advertising business on his own.

Rodriguez decided that the man quite possibly had an ax to grind. But if so, he was willing to do it in public with no regard for consequences. He undoubtedly felt right if not righteous.

Next day, Lieutenant Bennett began to display his customary early reaction to a case which did not swiftly live up to its original promise. This was not at all surprising, because traffic death spectaculars on the freeways, husband-wife-girl friend shootings, big money robberies, accidents and disputes and mayhem involving movie and TV Names, were constantly competing for his time.

Lieutenant Bennett had to function as an editor of crime in order to run an efficient station. Besides, the flat-hot and gusty Santa Ana winds were coming up unseasonably and a Class A fire in the Hollywood hills could have put the brakes on his regular activities at any time.

Sparring mentally with young Rodriguez, the police veteran tried to make up his mind about the relative importance of Arthur Colman's death. "The coroner is sure that the poison found in his stomach was the cause of death. Not drowning. But who could prove that he didn't take the stuff himself? The alternative is a Mick-

ey Finn, which seems improbable."

"Do you suppose somebody could have forced it down his throat and kept him out of circulation until it took effect?" Rodriguez asked.

"That would be one for the horror movies, Joe. We'll get you in the cast if it turns out that way."

The lieutenant's desk phone buzzed. He listened and passed the receiver to his subordinate.

The voice on the wire was that of John Applegate. He was highly excited, and seemed incapable of saying much that was intelligible.

"The Pyracantha manager is panicking," Rodriguez said. "Someone wanted to get into the Colman apartment. Something's happening there we'd better look into pronto."

"Let's go!" Bennett seemed almost relieved, as if the news had been tailored to end his indecision. Now at last the case was showing promise. He ran with the slender plainclothesman to the alert car parked on Wilcox Avenue.

Rodriguez slid behind the wheel, squeezed the siren button, and the car leaped out toward Sunset Boulevard. They watched automobiles slide to the right and stop, and heavy traffic at both Sunset and Hollywood Boulevards halt on the green light as they slammed across the rivers of frozen traffic and raced up to Franklin Street.

Rodriguez cast a swift glance sideways and saw that his grey-templed, sedate-looking boss was enjoying himself in the swift prowler car. Old times were back. He could be thinking of another Blue Rose murder case!

Long before the Pyracantha approach, Rodriguez eliminated the siren, and they came in slowly, unnoticed.

"I made a mistake, I made a mistake," Applegate began saying the moment the policemen appeared.

"I shouldn't have done it, but I signed for it," he said. He pointed to a wooden box, bigger than an Army foot-locker and stencilled "*Props. Vertex Revue*" on all sides.

"It's marked for Art Colman and the express man insisted on leaving it. I think I know why. There's a funny smell coming out of it."

"Let's find out. Open the apartment, Mr. Applegate."

The lieutenant and Rodriguez lifted the box inside to the pantry floor. The way bill showed that its point of origin had been Palm Springs. A kitchen knife was strong enough to cut a lead seal on the binding strands of thin wire.

As the cover was raised a sickly odor came up from the folds of piled cloth wadding. Lieutenant Bennett pulled aside several clumps of the wadding and tugged at some cloth which would not

come away. The cloth was the clothing on a dead girl.

"My God, it's Inga!" said Ap-plegate. "Inga Swar—Art Col-man's friend."

Inga Swar lay in the coffin-like box on her side, her head nudged around in a curve that gave her almost the aspect of a golden-haired sleeping child, tuckered out and sound asleep. She had been very beautiful. Rodriguez was sure of that. She was beautiful even now. Squarish face, soft puffs of taffy-blonde hair, stylishly tailored play clothes. None the less, stone cold dead.

"Get Homicide to send up a station wagon with loading space flat and the tailgate open. Tell them to come in on the slow. No racket. We'll keep this exhibit to ourselves as long as we can."

Rodriguez wondered if Bennett wasn't exercising too much restraint. His case was now sensational from a newspaper man's viewpoint. What a picture that improvised coffin would make on the doorstep of a bachelor's apartment! Rodriguez felt the lieutenant should not mind being in such a picture, looking unusually grim but well in command of himself as he faced the reporters.

Rodriguez went to the prowl car and sent the message through. Walking back to the apartment, he thought that there would be no more classroom psychology for a time. His chief now had a hot one,

and that meant 24-hour days of more practical psychology until all the hunches, clues, and leads were checked out.

As soon as the locker with its pathetic burden was clear of the Pyracantha court and on its way to the coroner, Lieutenant Bennett assigned a special officer to question closely any young resident he might find on the premises, as well as anyone who wandered in. With Rodriguez, the lieutenant went to Inga Swar's smallish apartment and instructed the manager to telephone ahead if any callers seemed about to interrupt their work.

The slain girl's clothes closet received a fine tooth combing first; then the work desk and on around the room to a little table of miscellaneous souvenirs. She had evidently been extremely serious in her dedication to a stage career. Most of her books were plays or instructional works. Among the scripts she had studied was one of "The Vertex Revue." Her portable make-up case was professionally large and had a fold-down arrangement inside, and contained many tiny bottles of creams, shadows, and other theatrical beauty aids.

Two letters disclosed that her parents were named Swartzmeister and lived on a ranch in North Dakota. She appeared to have been no different from the usual run of Hollywood aspirants—once

a winner of a local beauty contest and an actress in school plays.

"Here's something," said Bennett.

He held up an enlarged snapshot of three people in a desert setting that could have been either Phoenix or Palm Springs because of the tailored orderliness of the cactus garden strip in the background. Inga Swar was in the middle. Art Colman, not much taller than Inga, was at the left. An older man in rather formal sports clothes —two-toned shoes, white slacks, and a panama hat—stood at the right.

"The old gent must be none other than Little Joe Walford," said Rodriguez. "He doesn't look like a Little Caesar type. He looks like a fugitive from Squaresville."

"Looks fatherly, I'd say," said Bennett. Then he smiled at a sudden thought. "Vertex Motors is not going to like this, but their boy may be getting them plenty of publicity soon."

A knock sounded on the apartment door. The lieutenant said quickly, "Come in!"

Two girls, primly dressed and hatted, stood in the light when the door swung open. One was Shirley Smith; the other, Karla Noldte. They appeared tongue-tied and their eyes wide when Rodriguez introduced them.

"You seem to know your way around here," Bennett said rough-

ly. "Don't you usually call in from the desk when you come to see someone?" The lieutenant meant to sound harsh, and he succeeded.

"Why," said Shirley, "the truth of the matter is, we have not heard from Inga since we saw her at the Springs and with Mr. Colman dead we thought she ought to have somebody to talk to and comfort her."

"You know her that well?"

"Yes, you could say that. She hasn't many friends. Mr. Colman liked her, and that's how we got to know her."

"At one of Arthur Colman's parties honoring Joe Walford, president of Vertex Motors?" Bennett asked.

"Mr. Walford?" said Karla. "I don't quite see what you mean—"

The lieutenant interrupted the girl by saying to Rodriguez, "Joe, please check on those interviews in Mr. Applegate's office. I'll give these girls the facts. They'll be reading the papers soon anyway. Now, are you the Vertex secretary?" he asked, addressing Karla.

IV

JOE RODRIGUEZ left, telling himself it was very wise for an old hand like his boss to break the news of Inga's death to her close friends. He knew how to do it in just the right way, and could forestall an outbreak of hysteria.



In the outer office of the manager, several young men and two women waited and talked, in a scene which required no knowledge of acting. They were awed and a little appalled by the rumors they had heard, and at the same time were looking forward to being interviewed by a real detective.

Rodriguez went inside, and waited out the final questions to a girl who was then ushered out a side door by Mr. Applegate, who had installed himself as a helper.

"It's breaking down to a pattern," Dick Blum, the interviewer said. "Most of them admired Inga Swar. She was a kind of queen bee here—intense about her ambition to be an actress. She could sing a little and dance, and she was quite sure she'd make the grade. About half of these young people criticize

her for playing up to older men—the type we used to call sugar daddy. Others disagree. They think Inga had the right idea in getting as much help as she could from men with money.

"A few of these people say they liked Colman. Those are the ones who had been invited to his parties. They say his friends were 'interesting.' They probably mean that they were business successes who could pick up the tab for a dozen or more spongers at a Cinegela restaurant. But most of them clam up, and won't say what they really thought of Colman.

"The freeze sets in—so they obviously didn't like him around particularly. Two of these little broads had met Walford and could remember what he looked like. He was an old geezer robbing the cradle, but a real good dancer."

"That's something to go on, Rodriguez said. "Apparently there are some undercurrents of jealousy among the inmates of this zoo. If Colman paid attention mostly to Inga Swar it's not hard to figure out why he wasn't exactly popular."

Rodriguez returned to the dead girl's apartment and found Lieutenant Bennett making lists. He sifted through record albums and singleton platters.

"Look at this one," Bennett said and grinned. "Walford fancied himself a producer."

The platter had several small

cuts, like a segmented radio commercial disc. A printed label read "Vertex Revue—Joseph Walford, Producer—Lyrics I, Vertex in Orbit—II, Big V for Me."

While the lieutenant sorted and wrote an occasional note, Rodriguez examined the souvenir catch-all. Playbills, tiny match boxes, and gimmick favors told a story of theater-going and dining in top spots of New York, Phoenix, Palm Springs, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Whether Inga collected them from others or saved them herself after going to the places was a fact unknown.

After a while Bennett, who had been silent and thinking while he worked, said, "Those two girls know more than they told me. They can't believe Inga's dead, of course. The usual shock and so forth. But they didn't convince me they came up to see her out of the kindness of their hearts. What would they have been looking for?"

Newspaper reporters and cameramen were arriving in considerable numbers now. The newsmen pleaded with, and finally threatened John Applegate, but he refused to open the Colman apartment. After some fuss, they hooked on to Pyracantha residents and the flash bulbs began to pop. A field day took shape for aspiring dramatists. It was the very first authentic Hollywood publicity for most of them. Two

girls hurried to oblige with swim-suit poses at the pool.

Although no one thought about it at the time, Lieutenant Bennett's case was on the way to becoming a candidate for the all-time Top Ten in a long list of local chillers. The public image of Art Colman, painted in printer's ink and vocal on the air waves, emerged out of the Pyracantha interviews of reporters was "Uncle Art and His Pitchman's Paradise" and Inga Swar became "The Golden Moth." Walford was as yet in the wings of the press production. The photos of the apartment, which photogs took the first time around, were now of greater news value. They reinforced the framework of the "image."

By the end of the day a Michigan delegation arrived by jet. The men had scarcely needed the prompting of Louis Halliwell's calls to drop everything and appear. With Walford was his entourage, his personal staff of General Sales Manager, Ervin Felton; Director of Public Relations, John Wherry; and Executive Assistant to the President, Wilson Lands. With Don Bolling, the executive officer of the ad agency, was Vince Connelley, a senior vice-president.

John Wherry, the glorified press agent, immediately contributed a side bar to the growing story by phoning the city desks and saying that the Vertex and agency people were here to attend the funeral of

their friend Arthur Colman, who was without living family ties, and that while here they would assist police investigations in any way possible. The visitors were staying at their favorite headquarters, the Consular.

"Thanks to this advance publicity we have time to get ready for these visitors," the lieutenant informed his staff. "Here are your assignments."

Rodriguez drew one that was ideally suited to his youthful looks and approach to life. In fact, as he drove into the Pyracantha grounds, he went unnoticed because he looked like just another Hollywood candidate for movie and TV parts. He even left his shoes in the car and put on loafer sandals.

"Anybody doing anything about Inga's funeral?" he casually asked a blonde girl who sat down in a deck chair close to him at poolside.

"We should, shouldn't we?" the girl said. "But I hate even to think about what happened. It's really horrible. My folks are sure to read of Inga and that could be the end of me in Hollywood."

"You can't leave now," Rodriguez pointed out. "Two people dead! Everybody suspected. The cops would think your running away very strange."

"If they had any sense they'd talk to Mr. Colman's so-called friends. They ought to know what

was going on here. I think Inga made a mistake playing up to those squares."

"What makes you say that? The old Vertex Motors man was loaded and probably passing out C notes as if they were going out of style."

"She didn't need him. She was a talent and all she needed was a small break to be a Name. Those old goats at Mr. Colman's were non-professional—and besides, they were just playboying around away from home."

"The old guy produced shows for his auto company, I understand."

"Shows! Hour-long commercials. Inga showed me the book on one."

With gentle pumping, Rodriguez ran across other reactions that were along the same general lines of distaste and derision on the part of the young would-be's. They were mainly idealists with checks from home which enabled them to afford the luxury of art for art's sake, and they looked down their noses at the purely commercial side of life.

The situation seemed to be one of tolerating, in an almost patronizing way, the few business men who horned in on the atmosphere they had created by giving parties. Rodriguez could not find anyone who was mentally disturbed enough to suggest himself as a possible killer.

He returned to the station to

make out his report and there found a tall, husky young man with craggy features waiting for him. It was Brad Melnikov, just back from Lone Pine.

"This is more important to me than fishing," he said. "There's nothing I would like better than to see those people under the gun themselves for a change."

Rodriguez sensed why the stern man did not feel at home in the tailored world of ad agency people with whom he had worked as a promotional man. He was the kind of man who had no difficulty in winning the respect of dynamic sales-generating dealers. But in other fields he found the sledding harder.

Melnikov left several phone numbers where he could be reached if needed, and then left.

By now Lieutenant Bennett had the case progress sheet filled with new information. Karla Noldte had cashed a personal check of Joseph Walford's for \$20,000 at a bank in Palm Springs. Item two—Walford and his entourage of executives had been at a motel in Palm Springs just three days ago, enjoying some relaxation after the Vertex new model preview in Los Angeles before flying back to Michigan in their company airplane. Item three—Fannie Harmer, star of the recent Vertex preview show, had auditioned before several Broadway show people in Art Colman's suite at the Springs.

Item four—Art Colman's convertible, which he had used at the Springs, had been found in a public parking lot at L.A. International Airport. Item five—Detective Ed Claypool, stationed at the Pyracantha Palisades, had reported finding a safety razor at Inga Swar's apartment. A little price sticker on the side of the case had marked the article as coming from Stone City, Michigan.

"Shows how easy it is to miss," said Bennett. "I saw the razor and thought it was the girl's. I never even noticed the price tab. Come to think of it, it was a man's type razor."

V

LIEUTENANT BENNETT'S decision to bring everyone to Wilcox and De Longpre, rather than troop them into the big police building downtown, was a winner. The gathering would thereby loom up as less important. After all, no one had to come. No warrants had been sworn or any kind of compulsion resorted to.

Bennett knew from experience that some cases solved themselves when allowed to do so, free of legal entanglements and blow-by-blow publicity. He knew, too, that he ran a risk in calling these star chamber quasi-official gatherings, and he never went through with them if people brought their own lawyers, and were inclined to be formal, thus changing the folksy,

voluntary character of the testimony.

The time was after 3 P.M when the final home editions of the evening papers in L.A. and Hollywood were coming off the presses, and split staffs were covering numerous news bases for the final-finals. The morning sheet, by previous practice, had seldom planted a reporter around Hollywood station in daylight hours, inasmuch as the area was a nighttime target for news. This was why Bennett picked 3 P.M.

Rodriguez spotted Mr. Joseph Walford at once when the group came in. The bantam Walford was a few steps in advance, as if accustomed to being followed like a Chief Executive Officer. He was bald to the ears, extra gaunt from dieting, but apparently of a wiry strength.

He had an appraising quality in his assertive brown eyes and looked out at the world with a self-sufficiency, that predicted a bristling response if he were ever crossed. The impression he conveyed was that of a man in agreement with himself and that he was an exceptional person and was determined to be reasonable about it. Rodriguez grinned, thinking how this little man had been described as a great dancer. He couldn't visualize him as another Fred Astaire, but only as a comedy act on the dance floor.

Felton was big and smiling.

Wherry's first noticeable quality was a pitiful nervousness, and Lands' was brisk attentiveness to Walford. Lands was the one placing the chair for Walford, while Wherry was the one jumpily agreeing with Lieutenant Bennett that the loss of an associate was a sorrowful thing.

In the group were Louis Halliwell and his secretary, Karla Noldte; Don Bolling, Vince Connelley, and Shirley Smith of the ad agency. When they were seated, Brad Melnikov came in quietly, unobserved, and sat in the back.

"I don't want you to get the idea that I'm holding a court here," Bennett said with good nature. "Your appearance is voluntary—and appreciated. We want to clear up a few matters which may or may not have a bearing on other matters of much graver significance. I hope this case does not have to become a court matter. If you gentlemen care to tell me all you know, we'll get somewhere faster. Somebody took the lives of two people. All we are interested in is finding out who the murderer was and bringing him—or her—to justice."

"That's right," said Walford, "and I'm ready to offer a reward for information."

The lieutenant ignored the interruption and proceeded exactly as he had planned. He did not believe in rewards, which to him meant an aftermath of crackpots

who wanted the money. His affable manner vanished with the first question.

"Mr. Walford, when you went to the Pyracantha Palisades, did you ever visit Inga Swar in her apartment?"

John Wherry reacted as if the question to his chief was an insult. He sat up erect and nudged Lands next to him and tried to catch the eye of Walford.

"Why, of course not," Walford said, with a brief cluck of amusement.

"Here is a razor," said Lieutenant Bennett as he brought out the article. "It was purchased in Stone City, Michigan. You may examine it up close."

Walford took the razor and twisted the handle. Then his expression of concentration eased and he said. "Now that I think of it, yes. I did use a razor up there somewhere. Erv, remember? I was rehearsing my dealer talk in Art Colman's apartment. Art came in from the pool and monopolized the bathroom while he changed clothes. Somebody took me over to another apartment. That could have been Miss Swar's. I took a quick shave."

"The razor was there waiting for you?"

"Lieutenant, if you knew me you would know how easy that could happen. I seldom do anything for myself. People work out my schedules, take care of details,



handle things. Someone had a kit with them just for such emergencies." Walford's eyes swept the group.

"As a matter of fact, I did," said Wilson Lands. "I was just trying to think whether we used Mr. Walford's spare razor in Phoenix or Palm Springs or here. It was at the Pyracantha when the boss was polishing up his dealer

meeting presentation and had to rush like the devil to keep on schedule!"

The executive assistant seemed pleased with himself and relieved to provide an explanation apparently satisfactory to Lieutenant Bennett.

"Who is Fannie Harger, Mr. Walford?" was Bennett's next question.

"I can answer that," John Wherry broke in.

"Who was Fannie Harger, Mr. Walford?" Bennett repeated.

The Vertex president was now a bit grim. The direction of questions was having its effect.

"Miss Harger is a fine talent we discovered in our Vertex musical shows. You see, we introduce our cars to dealers in sugar-coated form, surrounded by a show. Some of our stars have gone on to Broadway parts in the past years. Miss Harger is a recent find and I predict that she will be a name in lights."

"With your personal help of course."

"What do you mean by that? It's a Vertex matter—"

John Wherry interrupted, saying, "That's just an expression we use in public relations. It's a helpful thing for business organizations to do for artists."

"Twenty thousand dollars worth of expression?" Bennett said dryly to the audience at large. Karla Noldte's precise mouth opened a

bit. The others were puzzled, some looking from one to the other.

"I asked for your cooperation," Lieutenant Bennett reminded them. "If you don't care to give me that, of course, it can all come out in court proceedings later. Miss Noldte, you cashed a personal check of Mr. Walford's in Palm Springs for twenty thousand dollars. That check seems to be of sufficient size to warrant our attention. Was that check for running expenses? Or Las Vegas? Or Santa Anita?"

"Did you give me the money?" Walford asked the girl.

Miss Noldte nodded.

"I gave you five thousand in hundreds and turned the balance over to Mr. Colman, as you instructed me to do. It was my understanding that you wanted Mr. Colman to have the money ready in case Miss Harger needed an advance for her preliminaries. The money was also to be in the nature of a binder agreement on the New York project."

Louis Halliwell intently watched his secretary as she talked. His look was one of mystification.

"That's right, come to think of it," said Walford. "Have I got the five thousand still, I wonder." He examined his pocketbook and shook his head negatively. Then he suddenly turned around to Felton, Lands, and Wherry and said, "Well, did Art Colman make the agreement? Did he use the money

to bind it and start the ball rolling?"

No one knew.

"I have a man in Palm Springs now," said Bennett. "If you like, I'll have him talk to Miss Harger and her Broadway friends. That will save you the embarrassment of asking those people if you paid them any money and how much. They could say no to you, couldn't they? And you couldn't very well prove that you had paid them."

The lieutenant seemed to be enjoying his moment, for his voice was faintly tinged with sarcasm and his eyes were shining. He had never worked in the business world in his life and it evidently amused him to discover that the supposedly efficient were capable of stupid mistakes like everyone else. He now directed his attention to Don Bolling.

"Mr. Bolling, what salary did you pay Arthur Colman?"

Bolling made a wry grimace. "This is a personal matter, of course. I don't have to answer it. But I guess it won't go any further."

"No, it won't," Bennett assured him. "It will just save us a trip to the Franchise Board, where state income tax returns are on record." Bennett did not choose to elaborate on the vast amount of red tape he would have been compelled to unwind to accomplish such a trifling mission.

"Twelve thousand dollars a

year," Bolling said. "That's not a spectacular salary. But we picked up his club, travel, and entertaining expenses. Also his car and mileage."

"There wasn't too much left for highlife then after he paid a single man's income tax," Bennett summed up.

"Now, Mr. Melnikov, after thanking you for coming all the way back from the Sierras to be here, I'll ask you just one question. To your knowledge was Arthur Colman engaged to Miss Swar? In other words—were they serious in their relationship?"

"I think not," said Brad Melnikov.

Bolling and Connelley looked around in dismay, for they had not seen Melnikov come in.

"Art knew he was in a weird set-up," Melnikov continued. "He was living on the fat of the land, as far as people could see. But actually he was severely handicapped if he wanted to splurge. I talked with him about it once. I wanted to get up a special memorandum for Don Bolling and let him know this West Coast branch was not a bed of roses.

"There was work to do, and it wasn't all play. We were both entitled to a better shake. But Colman couldn't see it at the time. He wavered a bit, and ended up saying he didn't want to rock the boat."

"So you decided to look else-

where. Can you tell us anything about potential enemies Colman may have had? People he may have had a serious difference of opinion with?"

Brad Melnikov looked at Halliwell and laughed cynically.

"You better ask Felton and Lands. Mr. Walford may not know about any disagreements. But there were some. You can be sure of that."

"Over what?"

"It's my guess that these lower echelon executives resented Art Colman being real buddy-buddy with their boss."

Felton spoke up then, an angry flush on his face. He was plainly returning Melnikov's antagonism.

"I had some words with Colman and I don't deny it. He was promoting nutty ideas to Mr. Walford. I told Colman that he better not abuse his friendship with the chief. I warned him that if Don Bolling knew how he was taking advantage of a personal relationship it would be the end of him.

"I admit I privately worried a bit about the close relationship," said Wilson Lands. "But I was in no position to do anything about it like Erv Felton. And besides, what the boss did was his own affair. There was nothing wrong in being a patron of the arts and it was certainly his privilege to associate with show people who happened to be in Art Colman's company. I'd say that show business

was fortunate, indeed, to have a top man of industry interested!"

A police orderly brought in a slip of paper and put it on the table in front of Lieutenant Bennett. Bennett read it quickly and glanced in the direction of Shirley Smith.

"Miss Smith," he said, "you told me yesterday up at the Pyracantha that you personally took care of Arthur Colman's bank account, paid his bills, and handled other minor matters. Mr. Colman had no taste for such things. Now, do you recall any special gifts of money to Inga Swar? I understand that he was underwriting her expenses at a local acting school."

"He never paid her anything in the nature of an allowance, if that's what you mean," Miss Smith said. "There was not much left in his account when his hobbies were paid for. He had a boat at Laguna Beach and a cabin at Big Bear but he never seemed to use them. He lost occasionally in the stock market, buying for rises that never came and selling short at the wrong time. He went in for undeveloped land in the desert and ran into taxes."

"Yes, he did keep that acting school running by supporting it financially. It wasn't too successful in finding jobs for young and not always very talented actors."

"It may interest everyone to know," Bennett said in the pause while tapping the paper, "that

Inga Swar died the same way Mr. Colman did. A powerful dose of barbituates."

In the hush that followed for a few seconds, the lieutenant and Rodriguez observed everyone closely, to catch possible sudden changes of expression. Detection was largely a matter of simple observation in Bennett's book. He favored simplicity because he believed that people in general were not as complicated as most psychologists assumed.

"I've had a chance to talk to most people here—some prior to our meeting," said Lieutenant Bennett. "I suggest now that if Mr. Halliwell, Miss Noldte, or Miss Smith have business or other reasons to leave, they may do so. I would like the rest of you to stay a little longer."

Halliwell and the girls seemed relieved at the chance to leave. When the others had settled back again, the lieutenant proceeded.

"I didn't think it was necessary to have those girls hear this," he said. "We're going to play some tapes we found in the apartment. This was evidently party playback gag stuff. Please tell me if your voices are recorded."

Rodriguez stared at his chief in surprise.

It wasn't like Bennett to give anyone, man or woman, special consideration if he suspected they were attempting to deceive him, or concealing any part of the truth.

An orderly put the first tape on the machine.

Joe Walford sat up in amazement. "I didn't give permission to make any recordings," he said harshly.

The party fun came out wild and loud. It suggested an appreciative crowd watching a floor show.

"Recognize that, anyone?" There was no response. Don Bolling flushed a bit and looked sternly at Vincent Connelley's somber face.

"I do," said Brad Melnikov. "I wasn't there, but I certainly recognize the voice of Fannie Harger. She has a very distinctive voice. I also recognize Vince Connelley and Lands and Colman in the background."

"Were you at a party recently that you can identify, Mr. Connelley?"

"Well—I dropped up there one night not so long ago. I should have telephoned first, of course, but some of us liked to drop in on Art and kill a little time when we were on the coast. I thought the racket was being made by some of Art's artistic friends in the Pyracantha. But too late, I walked in on Vertex people."

"Why wasn't Vince Connelley invited?" Walford asked Lands. "We had no secrets. As a matter of fact, that party was given for some of the cast of 'The Vertex Revue' after finishing the Los Angeles performance. Come to think of it, I



was doing a bit of the twist with Inga Swar. Everybody did applaud. But why was the recording made? Was Art in the habit of making records of what went on up there?"

"I think he intended to play it back to amuse his friends," said Felton. "He could have forgotten about that particular disc."

Little Joe Walford leaned back and wearily rubbed his eyes with his hands. He showed no interest in the remaining sequences of

party conversation, music and laughter, and the greetings of welcome at the door.

Lieutenant Bennett closed the meeting with a request which he explained in a friendly way: "We are running a detailed fingerprint analysis right now to see if we can sort out one or two prints of particular significance. For example, the prints of some unknown person who could have entered the apartment and ambushed Colman. Since your prints will show up in quantity, we want to get them while you're here. At least, prints of all out-of-staters who don't have California driver's licenses."

VI

SINCE THE PRINTING job was a one-at-a-time operation, Joe Rodriguez left the room and went to the logical gathering point of any clique or group of people who might want to talk privately. He sensed the tension, for the silence was conspicuous. This gathering point was a parcelled out corridor leading from the entrance of the station to office entries, benches, and the stairways to the upper floor.

Rodriguez sat down in a chair in a little office outside of this corridor and waited. The bustle of investigators, phoning and talking to people, provided a kind of visible cloak for him. While eavesdropping in this ridiculously sim-

ple way, he had once heard a drunken screen writer threaten to 'get' a bartender and had tailed the disturbed writer to his car, flashed his badge, and convinced him that it was wiser to go home in a cab and avoid arrest for drunken driving.

Voices came to him in a short while. Vince Connelley and Don Bolling evidently having it out, and the latter's voice was raised in anger.

"You should have told me about these shenanigans. You realize that, don't you? Step by step, Art Colman was digging our grave."

"Yes, I know, Don. I should have said something. That party girl evidence was pretty sickening."

"It's a familiar story, or should have been to you. I've known it to happen before in agency relations. The top man makes an ass of himself when he's away from home base. The agency man plays around with him, but keeps it a secret from his own people. Think of the money Walford is pouring into these things! He cashes twenty grand and doesn't even know what's happened to it! Tell me the truth. Do you think Colman was milking him? Apparently the detective was on that trail."

"I'd say Art was about to try to milk the agency somehow."

"I don't understand it. Colman was an honest enough fellow back in Michigan. We know that. I

wouldn't have transferred him here in the first place if I hadn't thought he fitted the job. What happened? Did he go Hollywood, as they say? There's something pretty awful going on when he dies and his girl friend dies as well. We'll be lucky if we come through this keeping the Vertex account!"

"Good Lord! Don't say that!"

"Why not? Little Caesar is getting good and sore. I watched him when he listened to those recordings. He'll never blame himself, of course. He'll pick a handy goat to blame for his shortcomings and we are right in his line of sights."

"I should have reported to you, Don. But so should about six others who were right in the middle of it. They saw it, and kept their mouths shut. I guess they were afraid of becoming involved in a mess."

"Melnikov wasn't. He walked out. All the while I thought his nose was out of joint because Art Colman was taking the bows out here. I figured Colman was more valuable to us than Melnikov and so I let Brad go without a murmur. He sure in hell got his revenge. We have a problem, Vince. They'll all hold what Melnikov said against us."

"We can always point out that it might have gotten into an open court otherwise. Headlines—a national laugh. A local scandal sheet is already billing Colman as 'Uncle Art and his Pitchman's Paradise'

and the girl as 'The Golden Moth.' What will they call Walford?"

"Watch it. Here he comes now."

"A fine kettle of fish! Who got me into this?"

Rodriguez recognized the voice as that of Joe Walford.

"If you don't mind me saying so, Mr. Walford, it could be worse if we were up on a witness stand in a courtroom."

"It's practically the same thing. This police fellow says 'no court' all the time. But he's like a judge, jury and prosecuting attorney rolled into one. I'm about fed up."

"There's only one trouble, Joe," Connelley said. "We're not back in Stone City. We have to go along, especially since John Wherry put his foot into it and told the papers we were here to cooperate."

"Wherry did that? I've a good mind to send him up to that apartment and make him ransack it right now! There may be something else mighty damaging there. If Colman secretly recorded parties, he would have been capable of secretly recording anything.

"Now that I think of it," Walford went on, "I talked with him about many things—about his own place in the agency, about the girl, about Fannie Harger. I want those records! Those are personal. Nobody's going to hear them!"

He really means, Rodriguez decided as he listened, that no one in Stone City was going to hear intriguing tales of reputation-ruining

fun and foolishness. In impersonal Los Angeles, accustomed to an exposé-type revelation a week, the populace might be amused but would be quick to forget. Nothing would seem fundamentally bad about a visitor cutting up a bit or concealing the escapades of a friend.

Los Angeles was a good-time Charlie town where otherwise normal people shoved fully-clothed film stars into swimming pools for laughs on occasion. But there would be a different climate in Stone City, where the Board of Directors met.

A monitor call came over the squawk box for Rodriguez as Walford held forth indignantly to a growing group of listeners. The young detective felt, as he went to Lieutenant Bennett's office, that here was something different in his experience—a man so important in his own world that a police station did not awe him in the least. It would even give him pleasure, apparently, to work at cross-purposes with the law!

Lieutenant Bennett smiled like a conspirator at Rodriguez, showing his pleasure at some yet unexplained progress.

"Palm Springs," Bennett said. "Take your own car and lots of clothes. And you might be doing a little thinking about Shirley Smith. You heard what she said. She knows more, of course. The problem is to find out precisely

what she does know without a warrant."

Rodriguez concentrated on the Shirley Smith problem while rolling down San Bernardino Freeway at 65 miles an hour. He decided that since she handled Art Colman's personal finances she would be curious about the larger sums her boss spent. This should throw some light on Colman's enthusiasm for high-quality voice recording. When had Colman bought the expensive device and where? Who processed his work and what was his stated reason for the sizable investment? How that auto big shot had burned when he'd heard how he had been bugged!

Passing the town of Colton on the freeway's magic carpet and being reminded by the highway cloverleaf that the desert would come up soon, Jose Juan Rodriguez began to plan his work at Palm Springs in careful detail. His assignment was to arrange specifically for the former Arthur Colman hotel suite to be vacated, if occupied, and to be held open if unsold. Police at the Springs would help him make the arrangement with the hotel. He anticipated no difficulty on that score.

The idea was to have the bungalow available to any person or persons who might ask for it by number. Lieutenant Bennett was thinking in terms of fifteen thousand dollars unaccounted for. He was thinking, too, in terms of

double-checking previous information.

VII

A LITTLE OVER an hour later, Joe Rodriguez sat in a deck chair at poolside at the palm-shaded hotel and studied his psychology text in the growing coolness of Mt. San Jacinto's shade. The pool was a vantage point and he could glance up across the lawn and under the palms to see the entrance to the bungalow suite.

A strange but friendly swimmer soon came up to him and after engaging in small talk for a while said, "It was not Arthur Colman who ordered that props box sent to Hollywood. The photos don't check according to the night porter. It was somebody who impersonated Colman. I've notified Lieutenant Bennett. He's probably coming down tomorrow. So long, amigo."

Rodriguez folded his book shut. There were more important things to do, he decided. He went to his room and changed into a sports ensemble with plenty of distracting color in it. A glance in the mirror assured him that he was a pretty good imitation of a standard-type movie hero of Spanish ancestry.

He began a leisurely window shopping tour in the hotel court and outside on North Palm Canyon Drive. But always he circled



back near enough to determine whether or not the situation had changed at the bungalow, a change which would have been instantly apparent if a light had appeared in a room or on the porch.

In his role of man of leisure, the young detective soon convinced himself that it would be in character to drop in to the hotel's cocktail lounge and toy with some refreshment. He was distinctly startled when he entered the gloom of the room, and saw a threesome of two girls and a man who were somewhat familiar.

Rodriguez maneuvered to an unobserved angle of view and found that he had not been mistaken. Shirley Smith, Karla Noldte, and Louis Halliwell were sitting in

a secluded niche, with refreshments before them. He walked out of the cocktail lounge and took up a position of observation outside on the lawn by a hedge of oleander.

Louis Halliwell came out alone and disappeared in the direction of the registration desk. Rodriguez then wandered back to the bungalow area. A moment later a brand new Vertex drove up the path to the front porch and Halliwell got out. In the half-light, Rodriguez watched him move with a bellboy and his bags into the bungalow.

At the poolside vantage point, Rodriguez waited for about ten more minutes. The musty warmth of desert evening was pleasant. A whiff of night-blooming jasmine sharply perfumed the air. Rodriguez was in no hurry. He felt that a fortunate break was about to reward his efforts. It was like the lieutenant often said: Patience does it.

A rangy, athletic girl came hurrying from the lobby. She went directly to the bungalow, rang, and walked in. The swift arc of light showed her to be a blonde. The girl was Karla Noldte.

In a few minutes, Rodriguez sauntered over to the bungalow, walked up the five steps with a deliberately heavy tread, and knocked authoritatively on the door. There was no answer. He turned the knob, opened the door, and saw the startled faces of Hal-

Halliwell and Miss Karla Noldte. Halliwell had his coat off and was examining the back of a framed picture. Karla was on her knees on the thick carpeting. Part of the carpet had been rolled back.

"You can order me out if you want," Rodriguez said. "That's your privilege. Or you can explain now instead of later. What'll it be?" He smiled at them disarmingly.

"Let's sit down," said Halliwell weakly. "You caught us in the act, Mr. Rodriguez. We're trying to find that missing money. Karla has to account for it sooner or later. I'm not trusting Mr. Walford to take us off the hook. We're—well, just looking. I hope you believe me."

"I could believe you," said Rodriguez, "but what is Shirley Smith doing down here with you?"

"Shirley? Oh, you saw us arrive. I swear on a stack of Bibles that Shirley Smith is here purely as my alibi with Mrs. Halliwell! Shirley and Karla go around quite a bit together. If I came to the Springs alone with Karla, how would that look? I ask you?"

Rodriguez suggested they leave at once and make their arrangements to stay overnight.

When he had put the place in order again, he turned out the lights except for one lone lamp in the bathroom. Then he went into a huddle with the assistant manager of the hotel. The man was entirely

agreeable to holding the room again on reservation, especially since it had been already paid for once. Then Rodriguez went back to his own room and waited for the telephone to ring. But no one else asked for the suite that night.

Early in the morning a call came from Hollywood station and the message was relayed directly to Rodriguez. The Vertex Motors officials would soon be on the way to Palm Springs. They had made known their intentions to Lieutenant Bennett. Mr. Walford planned to see Fannie Harger, who had stayed over at the Springs since the audition.

The station officer in charge suggested that the ad agency people, Bolling and Connelley, would probably follow their client, because it was standard practice for ad men to shadow the client principals, and be available at all times. The practice was helpful, also, in screening out competition that might try to butter up the client. Rodriguez agreed, knowing Bolling's worries about the status of the big Vertex account.

Lieutenant Bennett was not available to Rodriguez. The boss was again up at the Pyracantha. His man there, Ed Claypool, had reported a new development.

In the few days since the nude body had been found in the pool, an equally grisly event had come to light that demanded police attention. A restaurant murder in

the San Fernando Valley grew big enough to require the assistance of Hollywood station personnel to overworked Valley staffs.

Yet the Pyracantha case had held Bennett's personal interest tight. In his time he had moved through several spectacular crimes connected with the film colony, but this one, in his estimation at least, topped the list, and took his fancy.

Rodriguez imagined that Bennett was still unsure in his mind about which group held the key to the door of guilt—the young would-be actors and actresses, or the business people. And, being Bennett, he was scouting in both directions at the same time.

Rodriguez re-examined the bungalow and learned that no one had entered. No one had as yet made a special request for that particular bungalow. The young detective wondered if the claimant would be familiar. The Vertex people were staying in a luxury motel on the edge of town, so he ruled them out.

Again Rodriguez took up his psychology text and again he was soon interrupted by the ringing of the telephone. The assistant manager said that a man and a woman had requested the bungalow by its number, saying it was their favorite.

Donning a busboy's linen jacket, the detective waited at the bungalow porch for the guests to arrive.

A daringly made-up blonde with an accented figure walked across the lawn, swinging an outside handbag. She was escorted by a well-built man who carried a motorist's picnic hamper and wore black-lensed sun glasses.

Rodriguez opened the door and went inside ahead of the couple. When they came through the door he was raising a window shade and being busily inconspicuous in the tradition of hotel employees.

"No luggage, porter," the blonde said, without looking at Rodriguez. "We're here just for the day and a swim."

Rodriguez knew that there was nothing unusual in this way of taking a day room. People relaxed and later drove on to a more significant spot on their desert tour schedule.

Rodriguez cupped the woman's half-dollar tip in his hand and started to leave. But as he crossed to the door he glanced into the small butler's pantry. Wilson Lands of Vertex was there, opening the refrigerator.

The next move was one that Rodriguez could not attempt because he had no jurisdiction. The hotel management could not be expected to take the initiative either, and seek out trouble. So the young detective put through a call to Lieutenant Bennett at Hollywood station.

"We'll take a chance and trust to luck that they are going to stick

around a while," said Bennett. "I'll be on my way from Burbank very shortly. Have a car at the Palm Springs Airport for me. Oh, yes, we'll get the CHP to stop Walford's car and send them in direct to the hotel. His car will be a Vertex hard-top with manufacturer's serial-type license. If we can intercept Bolling we'll send him in, too."

"Do you think this means that Lands is on his own?"

"Could be," Bennett replied. "We checked out Walford's hotel and didn't see Lands. The Walford car should be leaving Colton area about now."

VIII

IN HIS ROOM, Joe Rodriguez got busy on the telephone and talked to PSPD. Then he put on a blue flannel sport coat with gold buttons and shaped out a crush-down travel hat, the first hat he had worn in months.

As a visiting young loiterer of leisure once more, he peered into the window displays of distinctive clothes and gifts in the hotel patio. Near the middle of the patio he came upon the attractive woman in the bungalow. She was picking out a swim suit in the sports shop.

He outwaited her and watched her leave the shop and walk toward the pool and the cabanas. Several guests turned their heads to observe her progress. She was an



authentic style setter in her smart play clothes, with the chic touches of hair-do that mark the celebrity practicing her trade. Rodriguez knew the breed well and admired their proficiency. Their mission in the world was to gain attention and cash in on it. Nothing wrong with that in this Land of Make Believe, he thought.

When he reached the pool he selected a lawn chair that gave him a full view of the front and side of the former Colman bungalow. He kept his face screened behind pages of the morning paper. A few minutes later he got up and edged away, so that his position would not take on the earmarks of a plant to anyone watching him from behind the bungalow curtains.

He went to the hotel registration desk and found out that the party signing in for the day suite had used the undoubtedly borrowed name of 'J. Wherry.' Then he waited impatiently for the cars and the people to show up.

The first thing that Bennett said, when he arrived in golf slacks and sweater, was, "Now we've got brother Walford in a bind! Remember that inventory I made in the girl's apartment? Well—I should have played the platter marked for Vertex show songs. It seems that Claypool did while he was sitting around up there. There was one cut of Walford talking palsy with Colman and offering him a big chunk of money to join Vertex.

"There was another of Colman pleading with Walford to give Inga Swar a chance to star in the next Vertex show. The old boy knew something about Inga that Colman didn't—and he disagreed. Inga was not the amateur she would have had people believe. She had been knocking herself out around Broadway for a long time, trying to break in."

"Now we got Lands here, posing as Wherry," said Rodriguez. "I still can't understand his connection with the woman. She's undoubtedly Fannie Harger." He was frowning heavily now.

"Our little meeting shook everybody up," said the lieutenant. "That's exactly what I wanted to do. Actually it's the only reason it was important to have Melnikov there. He was the outsider with a chip on his shoulder and no reason to clam up. If they hadn't reacted, then the case might have closed up temporarily as a double suicide

with unsolved particulars, and it wouldn't be the first such case."

Soon a message came from the desk. Mr. Walford and two other gentlemen had arrived. Bennett and Rodriguez joined them and they went to the bungalow. On the way they revealed nothing to each other. Rodriguez wasn't worried about holding back information, for the Vertex people were profoundly puzzled and too numbed to put two and two together and figure out just why they had been summoned to the hotel.

Rodriguez went in first without knocking.

Wilson Lands sat in a bamboo armchair and stared up in eye-widening surprise at the tramp of feet on the porch. His coat was off and his face was gleaming with perspiration and flushed from exercise.

"What are you doing here?" Walford demanded. He stood in front of Lands and waited for an answer, but there was none forthcoming.

Lieutenant Bennett put his hand gently on Lands's shoulder.

"The time has come to talk," he said. "You're in trouble, Mr. Lands. Registering under another name is a misdemeanor. Minor perhaps—but it has made trouble for people who are in deeper trouble with the Law. Why did you come here?"

Lands bent down his head and for a space of seconds seemed

wrestling with his thoughts. He then looked up to Walford.

"I was trying to find the money," he said simply. "Colman had it last. He was supposed to turn it over to Fannie Harger, as you told him to do. He didn't. I was after the money. I was going to give it to her and get a business-like receipt. Advance on wardrobe and other preliminaries for her new show. Then you would be protected."

"Did you find the money?" Bennett asked.

"No. I've looked everywhere."

"Others looked, too," said Rodriguez. "Louis Halliwell and his secretary were in this room searching last night. In the pictures and under the rugs."

The statement stirred up Lands and he began recovering his natural briskness. He listened and laughed without humor.

"I'll soon know if you missed anywhere," the lieutenant said. "Just where in this room were these people looking last night, Joe?"

"I don't know," said Walford. "I wasn't here."

"I mean Joe Rodriguez."

"Right here." Rodriguez pointed.

Bennett gave the carpet edge a kick, up and over. A sheaf of green bills lay on the underpadding.

"Some one came to replace the money last night—not to look for money," said Bennett. "When it

was known that this money had disappeared, it was no longer worth anything to Karla Noldte. It was now hot money. On the other hand, Halliwell was trying to find it and release himself from the responsibility for it. As the regional officer of Vertex he would have had to account for it eventually."

"Miss Noldte is no crook," said Walford. "I refuse to believe that she intended to steal any money."

Lieutenant Bennett studied the man for a time and then said, "That's what I wanted to hear you say, Mr. Walford. I don't completely distrust the girl either. But she is mixed up in many loyalties—to you, to the regional manager, to Art Colman, maybe others. Perhaps she appointed herself custodian of the money until she could safely get it to Art Colman and prevent him from losing it, misplacing it, or giving it away to the wrong person."

"To Fannie Harger? That's hardly the case. Mr. Walford approved of advancing funds to Miss Harger," Ervin Felton pointed out. "Karla wouldn't plot against the boss. He entrusts her with matters of the utmost importance, like cashing checks, and making personal arrangements that Halliwell himself is not in on. She's been with the company a long time. She's earned her position of trust."

"That's well put, Erv," said Walford.

"Mr. Lands may have the answer, then," said Bennett.

In admiration Rodriguez noted the deft way that his chief lobbed the ball of suspicion back and forth. Bennett did not claim to be scientific in his approach, but he was a master at stirring up people,

"I know only one thing," said Lands stoutly. "I was trying to protect Mr. Walford. I made mistakes, yes, and I don't know what you are going to do to me. But I was only trying to protect my friend when I came here. That's my job, I wasn't going to let anything stand in the way."

Walford was nodding in approval when a knock at the door caused Bennett to swing about. It was Don Bolling and Vince Connelley, both startled and nervous as they gazed around the room at the familiar faces.

"You're just in time," Lieutenant Bennett said. "Do either of you gentlemen know how long Shirley Smith has worked for your branch office?"

"About three years," said Connelley.

"Where is she from? Michigan?"

"She's a local girl, as far as I know," Connelley replied.

"Surely, she couldn't be implicated in this," said Bolling.

"Mr. Bolling, let's say that the peculiar role of the modern secretary makes her a subject of police suspicion. Give girls in Miss Smith's position a sense of per-

sonal power on their jobs, where big money is involved, and anything can happen."

"Of course, you are referring to the Colman relationship," said Bolling.

Lieutenant Bennett did not reply. He chose to switch over, and concentrate on Walford. "How come you could trust Arthur Colman to handle these Vertex show matters alone, Mr. Walford? Was it because you were very close to him?"

"I wasn't close to Colman," said Walford. "I've never been really close to anybody in my life. All my relationships are strictly business."

"You offered him a thirty-five thousand dollar job to leave his connection and go to work for you."

Walford returned the detective's stern look and responded with peppery righteousness. "All right, I did! Now that I think of it, I did consider him for our advertising department and publicity, as a general executive. But he made mistakes in judgment occasionally. I knew him well enough to tell him of his mistakes. Colman was too weak to deal with a woman's shrewdness."

The presence of a roomful of vitally interested people acted as a trigger to Walford and he continued on with a torrent of half meaningless talk about his busi-

ness philosophy and methods of finding the right kind of executive brains.

While Walford was talking, Bennett took a note pad from his pocket and passed it unobtrusively to Rodriguez, saying, "Check out Karla at this number. Did she leave the money under the carpet or not?"

Rodriguez phoned from the bedroom extension. Karla readily admitted that she had been determined to get rid of the money as fast as she could, report that it was in the Colman bungalow, and thus keep out of trouble. She had realized that the only way she could accomplish this was to trade on Halliwell's fears in another direction.



IX

WHEN RODRIGUEZ rejoined Lieutenant Bennett, Walford had calmed down somewhat and appeared a meeker man. The Vertex and the ad agency executives were sparring among themselves with icily polite but deadly questions about the job offer. It was evidently impossible for them to say, in front of Walford, what they really thought about it. Mr. Walford had simply told Bolling that Art Colman had seemed a logical man to direct a national advertising program and get the best out of copywriters and artists at the ad agency. Vince Connelley listened to this

special plea with a sad expression on his face.

Wilson Lands, no longer the central figure of attention in the room, was stiff and silent as he looked out of a window. He was looking out of the wrong window if his thoughts were on Fannie Harger, for the door banged open with no warning and the room was electrified by the dazzling presence of the show girl. Everyone turned to stare.

Her swim over, she had changed back into playclothes and enhanced her attractiveness by the skillful application of lipstick and rouge.

"Good heavens," she said, "a convention!"

Her gaze passed to Lands at the window and her voice took on a slightly disrespectful and mocking tone. "So you found the money, baby. I thought for a while that somebody was backing out," she added, winking at Joe Walford.

"We'll be getting back to the subject of money," Bennett said dryly. "Meanwhile, a few questions. You're the only one we haven't caught up with."

The singer's light-hearted approach clicked off her face like a switch of a TV knob from situation comedy to Macbeth.

"You're a cop!"

"Lieutenant Bennett, Los Angeles Police Department. This is Officer Rodriguez of my staff. When did you last see Arthur Colman in this bungalow?"

"Why, the night before he went back to Hollywood and they found him in the pool."

"And then?"

"I left, around eleven-thirty that night, with Wilson Lands. Wilson walked me down the Drive and over to Indian Avenue to my hotel."

"And Colman was left here alone?"

"Of course not," Fanny Harger said. "That little creep Inga Swar stayed on. The one who was trying to horn in and take over the Vertex show next year. She came down to the Springs with Art. Poor guy!"

"I imagine you'd have no qualms about telling us how you feel about Miss Swar. Exactly what was the trouble between you?"

"Oh, it wasn't what you'd call trouble," she said acidly. "I just find it difficult liking no-talent people. There she was, pulling all the strings, trying to shoehorn herself into big-time. I ran across her in New York some time ago. She hadn't changed a bit except for the aspiring artist bunk and living in Amateur Arms. I respect Mr. Walford too much to let him get conned into that."

"Nevertheless, the girl's dead and we're trying to find out how it happened. When you and Mr. Lands left this suite, Mr. Colman was alive. Is that correct?"

"Of course it's correct," she said. Then she laughed with an unexpected coarseness and continued, "And so was 'The Golden Moth!' 'The Golden Moth'—Man, how corny can they get! Anyway, golden girl brought an overnight bag, from where she stayed with those two office girls, Karla and Shirley. I guess you know they helped on typing script changes at the run-through reading. She and Art were going to drive back to L.A. that night. Art looked really bad from overwork and no sleep."

"No sleep?"

"That man was on the go for ten days before the Vertex show went on in L.A. Parties on the

Strip, taking care of the brass. Then we came down here and started putting Mr. Walford's new project into shape. I'm just repeating what he told me about being dead in his tracks. And he looked it, too.

"Golden Girl was hovering around like a vulture, not a moth. Finally I got on to the pitch. She wanted an advance like I was getting for preliminaries. She was being sure she would walk right in and keep my seat warm on the next Vertex show. She had her boosters, too. Mr. Connelley there, for instance. And John Wherry."

"How about Mr. Lands? Whose side was he on?"

"'Dahling Wilson' had been on her side. Perhaps you should use the past tense, Mr. Detective."

"So he changed his ideas about her?"

"I mean he was the original rooter for Inga. Weren't you, Wilson? That would be back in New York a few years ago. Inga tried out for a dance part in one of the shows and didn't make the grade. Time passed and she appeared on the West Coast. A little bird told me that Wilson put the idea in her head. The brave attack on Hollywood! Friends on the coast from time to time to encourage her. Then she hit the jackpot. She heard of the Pyracantha and who lived there, if you follow what I mean."

"I'll ask Mr. Lands if it is true

that you once encouraged Miss Swar to try her luck in Hollywood," said Bennett.

"If he did, I certainly never knew about it," said Walford.

"I met her in New York," said Lands. "Most of us in this room met her there, too. She was one of a hundred people who tried to get a place in the Vertex show that year. They knew it was good pay and with luck might lead to Broadway."

"You haven't commented on any encouragement. I believe 'encouragement' was the word."

"I'm being truthful, frank, what-have-you on everything. I hope you've noticed," said Lands. "Yes, I loaned her three hundred dollars to get a new start out here."

"And Art Colman carried on the project," said Bennett. "Miss Harger, I think Mr. Walford wants you to sign a receipt for your advance, and when you take care of that chore, I would like you to stay a minute longer to help us clear up a small matter. Gentlemen, thanks again for cooperating with us. I'm sure this kind of cooperation may be the means of eliminating trouble later."

"I agree," said press agent Wherry. "Vertex doesn't need publicity right now and we have you to thank, Lieutenant."

Wilson Lands became by force of habit the brisk executive assistant again, though he seemed to be fighting himself agitatedly back

into character. He wrote out a paragraph of acknowledgement which Fannie Harger signed and Rodriguez witnessed.

Fannie stuffed the fat roll of hundred dollar bills in her hand bag and grinned exuberantly. She then looked around the room for Walford, saw him in the little kitchen pouring himself a glass of milk, and went to him and gave him a peck kiss on the cheek. Walford lowered his eyes like an embarrassed schoolboy.

"Hungry," said Walford as he led the entourage out of the room and back toward the hotel. "First food today."

Rodriguez noticed then that all of the men seemed in a pressing hurry, as if glad to let Fannie Harger stay and find her own way back to her hotel this time.

"I want to thank you, Miss Harger," said Lieutenant Bennett when the three were alone in the big room. "We like people who tell us the truth the first time around."

Fanny Harger laughed. "Why shouldn't I? I've told the truth all my life—all my short and highly successful life, ha-ha! You're going to hear from me next in a Broadway hit and I hope it makes another barrelful for Little Joe Walford, the sweetest angel a show girl ever had!"

"We didn't have anything further to ask you, Miss Harger," Bennett said. "We just wanted to tell you that we're getting close to

recommending an official charge to the District Attorney's office. We've got it down to three possibilities now."

"Don't tell me who," she said. She patted her purse and added, "I like all of the boys!"

Bennett sighed. "Well—that's that for now. Would you like to have Joe Rodriguez drive you to wherever you're going?"

"Oh, I'm not going for a minute anyway. My lunch, my lunch! I'm on that liquid diet stuff and I left it in the refrigerator. Awful tasting stuff, but it seems to do the job. Art Colman, poor guy, was on it, too."

She started for the pantry. Rodriguez and Bennett exchanged startled glances. The same thought had occurred to them both almost simultaneously.

"Wait!" Bennett said sharply. "This has been in here since you took your swim? Good Lord, I never realized—"

Bennett reached out and gripped her arm. "You mustn't taste it!"

"I see what you mean," she said quietly. Then she shuddered. "You know how suckers like myself drink that stuff, I guess. One big swallow to avoid the taste!"

"One big swallow, mickey and all," said Rodriguez. "Then it could be too late."

Lieutenant Bennett took the water glass of thick, whitish liquid from the refrigerator shelf. It was

one of the few things in the compartment. Then he found the opened food can in the garbage container.

"I may be wrong as six-bits," he said. "We'll let the chemists check us out on this. Maybe there's no mickey in it at all."

The discovery had left Rodriguez a little stunned. He was silent while Bennett packaged the find.

"Somebody planted the stuff that night," Rodriguez said. "Out of all the people who were in and out of this room for that audition, somebody made the plant. Then came back."

"Go on."

"All right. He returns to a god-awful mess. The girl is stretched out on the bed or the floor. She has spilled the drugged drink. Swallowed part of it herself. Colman is in the shower and doesn't know what's going on. He's dead tired. The stuff knocks him out."

"So now what does this somebody do?"

"I don't know yet. That's where the picture grows hazy."

"You're a big help, I must say. But your guess about the shower is interesting."

Rodriguez tried his best to look pleased.

Bennet was quiet for a time. Then he said to Fannie Harger, "We have a lot of checking out to do. I think we have it narrowed down to a few suspects now. All we ask you to do is keep quiet

about this." He tapped the package containing a tray, a full glass, and an empty can.

X

LIEUTENANT BENNETT flew back to Los Angeles in the police plane. He was anxious to get the laboratory analysis started. He requested Rodriguez to do one last thing before starting back in his car. The assignment was to check on the Vertex people and find out whatever he could that might be helpful in a general way. How had Walford taken it when he'd learned that Wherry and others were cutting capers with the show girls? How long was Walford planning to stay here? Was Lands back in the good graces of his boss and in line to be the future contact man with the show people, as Colman had been?

Rodriguez judged that Erwin Felton was about the most level-headed of the official group at the motel and he got together with him alone in a patio meeting.

"You could have knocked me over with a feather when Fannie spilled that stuff," Felton said. "Joe Walford is floored. He doesn't want any of us around him. In fact, he's out looking for Karla and Shirley Smith right now. They're here some place with Louis Halliwell."

"Here's where they are," said Rodriguez, and gave him the mo-

tel information. "Is Lands or Wherry inside?"

"John Wherry is, but Lands is evidently ducking Walford and no telling where he is. But he's registered and maybe he's slipped in to his room the back way."

The position of Ervin Felton in the Vertex set-up must have been stronger than that of the other staff executives, Rodriguez decided. The man was not nearly as concerned over disclosures as the others seemed to be. In fact, Felton acted as if he somehow enjoyed the situation that Joe Walford had created.

"Well, live and learn," Felton said now. "Personally, I'm for breaking this thing wide open with official statements, depositions. To hell with worrying about bad publicity. Let's start thinking about our own individual reputations as law-abiding citizens. How does that sound, young fellow?"

"Sounds Vertex Revueish," said Rodriguez with a kidding smile.

He then went to the desk and got the manager to take him to the Lands' room and open the door with a master key. There was no sign of intended departure in the place. Luggage was spread open on the rack. Pajamas were on a bathroom hook. On the work desk was a pile of correspondence and reports.

Rodriguez thanked the manager and left.

Driving up the highway home

Rodriguez wondered if it was wise to leave all of the people at the Springs unobserved. Somebody could disappear. Walford, for example, might get together with the blondes and charter a plane to Las Vegas for some action at the tables and Lieutenant Bennett would not be able to slap a writ on anybody.

In Hollywood that evening, Lieutenant Bennett called in Rodriguez and handed him the lab report. No drugs of any kind had been found in the food mixture taken from the bungalow.

"Apparently nobody had anything against Fannie Harger," he said.

"Maybe they quit while they were ahead. By the way, what was all that jazz you gave about three left, and then two left. Have you pinned down two candidates?"

"Of course not," Rodriguez said. "That was a red herring. The only person who had the temperament for cold-blooded murder and a strong enough frustration was Inga Swar, and she was a victim herself."

"Did you ever think that this pattern could fit in reverse. Colman was in debt and certainly pressured by Inga. So he washes her out. Then he himself could have simply drowned, after returning home."

"Who went to the trouble to ship Inga home, then? Who would want to send the box to Colman's own doorstep?"

Rodriguez had no answer to that.

"Also—to go back to our first lead—would Colman swim naked? I wouldn't put it past some of those juvenile actors. But Colman had a certain dignity to maintain. Maybe he would, of course, after fighting to get to sleep and finding that sleeping pills didn't help him."

A precise thought clicked in the lieutenant's mind, and he reacted to it by freezing all bodily motion for some seconds. Then he straightened and pointed a finger at Rodriguez.

"Joe," he said, "I've missed one vitally important thing. I never checked on Colman's coming back to the Pyracantha alive, and physically going into the apartment. I just took it for granted that he had. But what did he do with his clothes? What did you see there? Any positive signs of his being inside?"

"No clear signs, at least," said Rodriguez. "I saw dry swim trunks, folded up. I didn't want to disturb anything before the print men got on the job."

"Let's you and I take a run up to the Amateur Arms, as Fannie says. I haven't told you, but I've been taking a certain amount of heat from downtown on this case. First they saw your picture in the apartment, posing over a Chinese vase, and kidded me about when you were going to resign and join a private-eye detective agency.

"Now they rib me about our progress in general. Is it a suicide? Is it a natural drowning? A Palm Springs murder of the girl? Those guys make me sick! We've got to make faster headway, Joe. We almost have to recommend a charge, or withdraw tomorrow."

Rodriguez grew serious fast. He did not like to see his boss upset. It was not normal for Bennett to show that degree of worry. The lieutenant was too nice a guy to get needled over another man's mistake and the young detective felt profoundly sorry about the photo. It was a dumb thing to have let happen.

In the prowler car they drove near to Pyracantha Palisades and walked a half block in order to forestall the curious.

Ed Claypool was listening to classical music in Inga Swar's apartment. He had just finished a TV dinner, heated up on her small grille. He had a paperback novel out, marked flat on the table.

"This is more comfortable than the other place," he said. "But don't let my wife know I'm shacked up here like a ham actor."

The apartment did look very comfortable, and Rodriguez thought how cozy things would be in a layout where you listened to music and read books and did not have to jump to attention, when a radio call came in on the police-band. This could be a life to aspire to, the kind of life just the kids

who had made Pyracantha their castle were privileged to lead—until their money gave out.

Getting the key from Claypool, Lieutenant Bennett and Rodriguez went down the board walk to the terrace near the pool and the half circle of apartments that fronted over the Cahuenga Pass and the freeway below.

A light was on inside 27-A, which was not surprising, for Claypool broke away occasionally from his food and his music and his books to check up down there, and the light was a great aid to him.

The door was unlocked and the two detectives looked at each other in wariness.

They walked in quietly and saw two people—Wilson Lands, stretched out on a chaise lounge, apparently fast asleep; and Joe Walford, in the middle of the wall-to-wall carpeting, rocking sideways on his feet and holding a highball glass in his hand.

XI

LITTLE JOE WALFORD had obviously rounded the far turn and was coming into the home stretch of the blotto handicap. His command and poise had vastly deteriorated. His tie was at an angle on his collar.

"Found that boy in meat packin' plant," Walford said without welcome or preamble. "Meat

packin' plant, s'agine. Of all places—meat packin' plant. I build him up, help him over the hurdles. My 'zecutive 'sistant. My boy!"

Lieutenant Bennett crossed to where Lands was lying and felt his pulse. As he counted the beats to himself he became aware of a piece of paper protruding from beneath Lands's coat on the chaise lounge. He unfolded the paper with his free hand, and let his other fall as he concentrated on the writing.

"Dear Joe," the note read, "—if I can call you that for the first time in my life—you were going to bring Art Colman in, as you did me. Now someone else will be next on the big-salaried executive list. I won't sit by, and let you put me to one side. That happens every time the top man forgets you. I am going away. I haven't had a good night's sleep in—a—" The note went no farther.

Seeing the detective standing silent by Lands's side, Joe Walford moved in a zigzag path to the chaise lounge with the sure confidence of an intoxicated man. As he passed a big oriental vase he unknowingly bumped it. Over it went in a shattering crash.

Rodriguez had been peering in the open refrigerator. He looked up, instantly alerted by the unexpected clatter. He saw a carton come into view on the floor amidst a shower of broken ceramic pieces.

He picked up the carton and saw that it was marked with an address in Stone City, Michigan—a prescription pharmacy. The sizable carton was empty, except for one quite large white tablet.

"Lieutenant," he called quickly. "This pill was in the vase. There's some spilled milk over there, still wet. Do you think—"

"Call Receiving from this phone," Bennett said, cutting him short abruptly. "This man's barely alive!"

Little Joe Walford drifted about in a kind of waltz, talking to himself all the while.

Bennett blocked Walford away from Rodriguez, who dialed the number with fingers that were the opposite of steady.

"Hungry," Walford said in a tired voice. "Nothing to eat. Fine 'zeactive 'sistant! No food left. Found in meat packin' plant. Send him back. Get Art Colman! Colman good 'zecutive. Can't handle women. Where's my food? Wilson!"

Bennett took the bantam Walford by the shoulders and sat him down hard in a big leather chair amid the wreckage of the room. His head rolled to one side and he relaxed in a dazed sprawl, almost slipping from the chair to the floor.

Rodriguez finished on the phone.

"Give me a hand," said Bennett.

They picked Lands up like a heavy sack and half-dragged, half-

carried him through the door to the terrace lawn.

"The moment they arrive, get the pump in him," Bennett said to Rodriguez. "We don't know who's done what. But this fellow's ready to go."

As they turned away from the quiet heap in the dark shadows of the lawn, Karla Noldte and Shirley Smith blocked the light in the doorway of 27-A.

"I heard the call to Emergency," Karla said. "Thanks. It may save his life. He drank the stuff and I think it had poison."

"You were in there all along?"

"We hid from you in the bathroom," said Shirley Smith. "What else could we do?"

"Mr. Walford made us come here with him," said Karla.

"I just work for a living. I got in too deep I guess. Now look what a mess I'm in!" She tried to stifle her crying.

"You'd better tell us exactly what happened," Bennett said. "We're the law. You have to talk!"

"We followed Wilson Lands up the freeway from Palm Springs," said Shirley Smith. The blonde girl was hard-eyed and unbeautiful now. "He was running away from Mr. Walford. It was like he had suddenly gone berserk. We lost him on the freeway. We tried the Consular first. Then we thought of this place, because we knew Wilson had Mr. Walford's key to it."

"Walford's key!"

The blonde girl nodded. "This was a second home for Mr. Walford. He had it furnished especially for Art. Karla and I were his dinner companions three or four times a week. You had to come when he invited you."

"What about Inga Swar? She was supposed to be the Colman girl friend."

"Art didn't know how to tell her that Mr. Walford didn't want her around."

"Go on."

"Wilson Lands was writing a letter of resignation to Mr. Walford when we came in. Wilson broke down completely. He knew the whole set-up here. He was crazy jealous of Art Colman. He pleaded with Mr. Walford to forget the show business people, and avoid the danger he was in."

"Did you see him drink a milk mixture in a glass?"

"I did," said Karla. "I don't think he realized what he was doing. Mr. Walford was drinking highballs and milk chasers and then mixed up his diet food. They were almost hysterical, yelling and accusing each other and we couldn't do a thing with them. I saw Wilson take a glass that looked a lot darker than milk. I realized that straight off."

The detectives listened, all attention, not wanting to break the stream of willing revelation. When the stream ran dry, Lieutenant Bennett stared intently at Shirley

Smith's grim face. There was a hard, accusing look in his eyes.

"Miss Smith, Art Colman received an unexpected five thousand dollars from Mr. Walford at Palm Springs, didn't he?"

The girl did not reply.

"That money was really for Inga Swar. It was a sort of a buy-off and going-away gift, because Walford had made up his mind he did not want her in his plans. When Art Colman told you this, you demanded the money, didn't you? You figured that if anybody needed a chunk of money that large it was Mr. Colman himself, to put his finances on an even keel again. I expect you to produce that money or the charge will be simple theft."

The executive-type strength and grimness in the girl vanished in a flash and a scared little girl stood before him.

"I'll get it for you," she said simply, "and we'll tell you all we know. Yes, there was wild goings on here between Wilson Lands and Mr. Walford. Karla and I heard enough to know what the near fight was about. Wilson boasted openly about what he'd done to Art. He hated Art. He wanted to embarrass him at Palm Springs. He wanted to make him go to sleep and miss seeing Mr. Walford at the airport when the company plane took off for Michigan. He thought Art wanted his job and had plotted against him. Those re-

cordings were Inga's idea, but he helped her make them.

"At the hotel the pills were stronger than he figured they would be. And Inga, the little fool, drank the stuff, too, without knowing what she was doing. When Wilson came back to the bungalow for Inga later on he found them both dead or near dead. By mistake, he said.

"He bundled Inga into the box and had the night porter ship it. He brought Art's body back in the trunk of Art's car. Then he went down to the airport and flew back to Michigan. He's been going through the torments of hell and finally this afternoon he broke under the strain and ran."

At that point the prompt response to Rodriguez's summons transformed the Pyracantha into a riot of sirens, squealing tires, yelling voices, and running feet.

John Applegate watched the attendants set up the stomach machine on the terrace and his face showed distaste and frustration.

"This message Lands was writing," Lieutenant Bennett said, gently now, to the girls. "We hope to have him finish it in detail tomorrow, after a good night's sleep. In the meantime, you are both in protective custody until we get your statements in writing at the station. That goes for gramps, too, snoozing over there in his chair. He doesn't look much like the life of the party now, does he?"

Bennett went to the sagging Walford and shook him roughly.

"Wake up," he said. "We have a little ride for you outside. We want you to come down to our house on Wilton and meet some nice people."

"Can't go. Some other time. Going back—Stone City. Explain to Wilson's wife. Explain my wife. Personal—an' important."

"Ah, come on," coaxed Bennett. "You can spare the time. Sure you can. Stay overnight with us. Come on, pal. That's the way. Stand up now."

Rodriguez held the door open and with an effort Lieutenant Bennett kept Little Joe Walford on even keel. They walked like convivial friends up the terrace and through a ring of people and beyond to the station wagon from Wilton and De Longpre.

Bennett and Rodriguez rode back to the station together, leaving the others to Claypool to bring in.

"The five grand—" Rodriguez eagerly began his inquiry.

"It was the key to it all of the time. Nobody loses five grand that easy. Gradually it became plain that a wife—an office wife—would be most concerned. I took a flyer on that guess and was right."

Then he added, "Joe, if you don't mind, please handle the photogs at the station. They'll be looking for the Brass Candle that attracted the Golden Moth."



**REVENGE
FOR
A
MASSACRE**

**THE NEW
COMPLETE
THRILLER
MIKE SHAYNE**

**by
Brett
Halliday**

It wasn't the first time Shayne had tangled with a rogue cop and an old crime that almost had to lead to more violence. But coming out on the winning side was rugged.



THE POLICE CAR crossed the Southern Pacific tracks and climbed the long hill to the end of Jefferson Street. From the top of the hill there was a view out across the whole city of Santa Calbara. The man who sat beside the policeman who was driving the car, stepped out and looked down at the view for a long second.

"Beautiful, eh Tom?" the man said.

"Sure is, Mr. Palmer," the policeman said.

It was just at that brief, indefinite point of twilight when the last rays of the California sun are

about to grow faint and disappear. The man named Palmer seemed to sigh as he turned toward the small white house near the road. He had barely half-turned when he froze. The policeman saw Palmer go pale, and leaped from the car with his gun already drawn.

"What's up!" the policeman snapped.

The man named Palmer could only point, his face drained of all color.

There, at the edge of the road and hidden by bushes, was the body of a man. The man wore a police uniform,

"It's George!" the policeman cried.

He ran to the body while Palmer remained frozen where he stood at the edge of the road. He seemed dazed, unable to move. Then, suddenly, his eyes turned toward the white house. As if the motion of his eyes had broken the spell, Palmer began to run toward the house.

"He's okay, just knocked out," the policeman said, nodding as he looked up. When he saw Palmer racing toward the house, he called out, "Wait! Palmer! Hold it!"

Palmer ran on as if he had not heard at all. He went up the steps and through the door of the house. The policeman dashed after Palmer. Just as he reached the porch there was a wild, unearthly sound inside the house. A sound that was half scream and half moan, like a wounded animal.

The policeman ran through the door. Inside he stopped. Palmer was on his knees with his head buried in the lap of a woman seated in a high-back leather armchair. Palmer was making the moaning sound—a low, wailing moan now.

The policeman stared at the seated woman. Her eyes were open, but they were glazed and unseeing. There was a small black hole in the right side of her head just above her ear. The left side of her head was not there at all. The back of the leather chair was

caked and crusted with blood, hair, and flesh, and bits of bone.

Palmer raised his head. He turned to look at the policeman.

"He killed her," Palmer said. "Oh, God! Why *her*? It was me, he wanted! Oh, baby, baby!"

And the man named Palmer collapsed across the lap of his dead wife as the policeman went to the telephone to call in.

II

MICHAEL SHAYNE knew, as he strode into the office of Will Gentry, that the Miami Chief of Police was even more worried than he had sounded on the telephone. His lips were tightly compressed as he waved Shayne to a chair with the unlighted stump of his black cigar.

"It smells bad, Mike," Gentry said. "Real bad!"

"You said over the phone that I could help," Shayne said. "Suppose you fill me in, Will."

"I should have acted last week," Gentry said sadly, "but . . . well . . . officially we can't be involved. It's California's problem, and Marius resigned two weeks ago so we've no call to interfere."

"But you want to help Marius if you can," Shayne said. "You feel you owe him a debt. You implied that on the phone."

Gentry nodded. "Here it is in a nutshell, Mike. Ten years ago Joe

Marius and Walt Malone were partners here on the force—they made Detective two months apart. They were good detectives, the best, until the massacre. You remember it, Mike. We had a tip on the hideout of the Tucci gang right after the Daytona Beach bank job.

"Seven of our best men went to take the Tuccis. One got out alive—Joe Marius. They were waiting for us. Joe Marius was hit four times, but he survived. He's got that limp in his left leg for life, and he'll never bend his arm again. We'd have retired Joe, but we felt we owed him something, and he was a good cop. It was only his left arm that was crippled. We—well, we never regretted keeping him on. He was Detective Captain until two weeks ago.

Gentry paused an instant to relight his cigar. "Malone didn't go on that raid, that was why there were only seven instead of eight," he went on, tossing the match in an ashtray. "Malone called in sick that day. After the massacre we suspended him. Eventually we got all the Tucci gang, most of them in the morgue. Only young Mario Tucci, and Aldo Cannio survived. We put them away for ten-to-twenty on armed robbery. Cannio died in prison.

"We brought Malone up on charges, but we had no case. His doctor verified that he was really sick. We couldn't prove a tip-off



by Malone to the Tuccis. We never found a hint of any payoff. Mario Tucci and Cannio swore they never heard of Malone, and we recovered all the loot from the Daytona Beach Job. We made Malone resign, but Joe Marius swore he'd get Malone some day. They'd been real close friends.

"Marius always said he knew why Malone had tipped the Tuccis, but Malone quit and disappeared while Marius was still in the hospital, and Joe never told me what he thought he knew. He never talked about it after Malone vanished, I thought he'd forgotten about it. Two weeks ago he came to me and told me he'd found Malone and was going after him. I ordered Joe to forget it, but he just laughed at me, and resigned on the spot.

"A week ago I got a wire from the Santa Calbara police. A respected citizen out there, named Walter Palmer, reported that a man was following him to kill him. He described Joe Marius all the

way—limp, bad arm, and all. I didn't need a ouija board to guess who Palmer really was, but I checked. It fitted. Walter Palmer is Walter Malone. Yesterday, someone shot and killed Stella Palmer, Malone's wife.

"The cops out there say it's open and shut. Malone, or Palmer, was under twenty-four hour protection. There was a cop with him all day, there was a cop watching the house. The killer slugged the cop to get into the house. The cop blacked out fast and didn't see his assailant, except a glimpse of a man just about Marius' size."

Gentry stopped talking and stared at the far wall. The grizzled Chief of Police seemed sad. His teeth were clenched tight on the stump of his cigar.

"I can't see Joe Marius killing the wife for something her husband did," Gentry said finally. "I want to help Marius."

"Do you want me to go out?" Shayne said. "You can't make it official, of course."

"I know that," Gentry said. "I could send a man, but he'd be tied down. You'd be on your own, but that we'd back you if you should run into trouble goes without saying."

"I'm on my way, Will," Shayne said.

"One more thing, Mike," Gentry said. "Mario Tucci was paroled six weeks ago. He was the kid of the family. It was his first arrest and

he's been a good boy, so they couldn't deny parole."

"You think it could be Tucci?" Shayne said.

"If Malone tipped the Tuccis and got paid, he's been living easy while Mario was inside. Maybe Mario wants a cut."

"I'll find out the real story," Shayne said.

In his office the next morning Shayne told Lucy Hamilton to cancel all his appointments, and tell all his clients that he would be back in a few days. Shayne gave his secretary the address of the Hiltmore Hotel in Santa Calbara as where he would be staying. Then he caught the jet west.

III

WHEN SHAYNE LEFT Los Angeles in the rented car the sun was still high and as he drove toward Santa Calbara, the Pacific was a brilliant blue to his left. He drove fast, and by the time he reached Santa Calbara, the sun was just starting to set over the mountains.

He checked into the Hiltmore, showered, had three fingers of Martel cognac, and went down to his car. He drove straight to Police Headquarters. The Detective Lieutenant, whose name was Holly, was not glad to see him.

"We don't like rogue cops out here," Lieutenant Holly said.

"He's confessed then?" Shayne said.

"We haven't found him," Holly admitted.

"You may change your mind about him when you do," Shayne said. "You want to brief me on developments so far?"

"We don't like private detectives either," Holly said.

"But your Chief said to fill me in," Shayne reminded him. "*No-blesse oblige* to Chief Gentry."

"You won't get him off," Holly grunted.

"Maybe not," Shayne said. "Now the details?"

Lieutenant Holly reached for the file. Shayne opened the file and studied the pictures of the slain man and the house while Holly talked.

"Palmer said he was nuts, your Captain Marius. But none of us thought he'd really harm the woman."

"Did your guard see the man who hit him?" Shayne asked.

"No, not really. The man came up behind him like a real pro—the way only a trained cop could. All George McWhorters remembers is that he heard something like breathing behind him, turned, and got it smack on his head. All he can say for sure is that the man was about the size of your Captain Marius."

Shayne nodded as he studied the pictures. The dead woman was not pretty in the chair or on the morgue slab. The hole above her right ear was no more than a black

dot, but the wound in the left rear of her skull was as big and jagged as a fist.

"Yeh," Holly said, "pretty, isn't it? It was a thirty-eight, but soft-nosed, almost dum-dum. Whoever used it liked to make sure his shots stopped people."

"You have no clues on Marius yet?"

"Not a trace," Holly said, "but we'll get him."

"How about Mario Tucci?"

"Yeh," Holly said, "the red-herring Will Gentry dreamed up. No sign of him, if he exists."

"He exists, Holly," Shayne said. "Mind if I have a talk with Palmer?"

"My Chief says you can," Holly said.

"Thank your Chief for me."

Shayne walked out of the police station aware of an angry Lieutenant Holly muttering behind him. If there was one thing a policeman hated more than a cop-killer it was a cop who killed. Shayne could not blame Lieutenant Holly. If Marius was guilty, Shayne would hate him as much as Holly did.

One thing bothered Shayne immediately—where was Joe Marius? If the former cop had slain the woman, and wanted to kill his former partner, why couldn't the police out here locate him? Santa Calbara was a small city with almost no slums or other logical hiding places. Joe Marius was a man with a limp and a crippled arm. He

was also a stranger in a strange city.

In two days of searching, the police had not found him. Why? Possibly Marius had already left town? Or perhaps he had never been in town.

IV

THE WHITE FRAME house at the top of the hill on Jefferson was dark. As Shayne walked from his car he was twice challenged by policemen. The door of the house opened at his third knock.

Walter Malone, alias Palmer, was a broad, stocky man of average height. His hair was almost grey, and his face was hard. It was a tough face, but not a mean face. Shayne decided that it did not look like the face of a man who would betray his comrades for money.

"Yeh?" Malone, said.

"My name is Mike Shayne, Malone. I want to talk."

"The name is Palmer, okay shamus? Yeh, I remember you. I figured Chief Gentry would send a man. Okay, come on in."

Malone led the way into a small living room. Shayne studied the room. The big redhead began to tug slowly on his earlobe. If Malone had let his fellow policemen walk into that trap ten years ago, the stocky ex-cop did not seem to have profited much by it.

The house was small, the furniture was cheap and old, and there

were not a lot of modern conveniences. It was a nice, comfortable, but not very rich setup. It looked like what it was supposed to be—the house of a moderately successful business man.

"Sit down," Malone said. "Will Gentry always did back up his men. Except me, of course. But I sold out, didn't I?"

Shayne sat down. He studied the man. Malone seemed calm enough. His face was almost impassive but there was a touch of the sadness, bitterness, and bewilderment that would be natural for a man whose wife had just recently been murdered.

"You're sure it was Marius?" Shayne asked straight out.

"No," Malone said evenly, "I didn't see him do it. But he was after me. Like I told the cops, Joe called me from Miami. He'd found out where I was. I suppose he called to make sure he'd recognize my voice, and to scare me. He told me he would kill me."

"Joe always thought I got paid off to tip the Tucci boys. I asked for protection. Once I was sure I saw him hanging around the house. That was why I asked for a stake-out on the house. He got her anyway. Damn him!"

"Why would Joe kill your wife?" Shayne said.

"He must be crazy! If I'd thought there was a chance, do you think I'd have left her? So the cops stay with me all that day, and



Marius kills her! Funny, it sure gives me an alibi."

"It's a very good alibi," Shayne said.

"Too good, eh? Well, you have to crack it," Malone said.

"Can you think of anyone else who might have done it?"

"No."

"Mario Tucci got out of prison six weeks ago," Shayne said.

"Why would Mario want to hurt me or Stella?"

"You tell me?" Shayne said. "You've been free while he rotted in jail. Maybe he wants a cut of that payoff ten years ago. It doesn't look like you spent it. I don't think you would have, not with Joe Marius still alive and looking for you."

"If there was a payoff," Malone said evenly. "Only there wasn't."

"Okay, maybe there wasn't," Shayne said.

Strangely, for some reason he could not explain even to himself, Mike Shayne believed Malone. There had not been a payoff. But there was something strange about the ex-Miami cop. It was as if the stocky man had seen something very ugly many years ago, and had been sad and embittered ever since.

"One thing puzzles me," Shayne said. "You say Marius called you two weeks ago. You think you saw him. He is supposed to have slugged a cop and shot your wife. Now no one can find him. It doesn't figure

he could hide so well in a strange city."

"Joe always was a good cop, Shayne," Malone said.

"You're sure Marius isn't dead, too?"

"Who knows? Like I said, I haven't really seen him. You said Tucci was on the loose. Maybe Mario got him."

"Why would Tucci want Marius?"

"Who knows, Shayne? Joe did a lot to finish the Tucci gang," Malone said.

"Maybe, *Palmer*," Shayne said, stressing Malone's assumed name. "Okay, but I'll be back."

"I'm not going anywhere, Shayne, I don't have to, I've got the best alibi in the book."

Outside the small white house, Shayne paused to light a cigarette. He was puzzled. Marius seemed to have vanished into thin air, and Malone had an ironclad alibi. So far no one had even hint-

ed at a motive for his wife's death other than revenge on the part of Joe Marius—and there was no evidence to show that Marius had any real reason to seek revenge. Maybe Joe Marius was, after all, simply insane.

In his car, Shayne drove off down the hill. Two blocks away, he parked and sat in his car smoking and tugging on his earlobe. It was all too simple. If Joe Marius had not killed Malone's wife, then no one had. Except, perhaps, Mario Tucci.

And if it had been Tucci, what was the motive, and where was Tucci? The only two men connected to the case, Tucci and Marius, and neither could be found anywhere.

Shayne started the car and drove to Police Headquarters. Lieutenant Holly was not there, but the desk sergeant told Shayne that they had found no one yet. There was nothing more Shayne could do that night. He drove home to his hotel. He walked through the lobby of the Hiltmore to his ground floor room.

In his room Shayne poured three fingers of cognac from his bottle of Martel, undressed, showered, and lay in bed smoking and drinking his brandy. By the time he had finished his second three fingers of the good cognac he was sleepy, and he was no closer to any answer except that Joe Marius had, indeed, come out here for

revenge and killed Stella Palmer.

Shayne had turned the light out, and was almost asleep, when he heard the noise. He lay without moving, his big hand curled around his pistol. Slowly, he turned his head.

The noise had come from outside his window, which the room's air-conditioning had made it unnecessary to raise. Carefully, Shayne turned his head until he was staring into the moonlight which flooded the pane. A shadow suddenly crossed the pane from right to left, and flickered on the wall beside Shayne's bed.

The fainter shadow of a hand with something in it appeared at the left side of the window. Shayne lunged and rolled from the bed. The roar of a gun was thunderous in his ears. There was the sound of breaking glass, and the bullet smashed into the wall directly above Shayne's head.

Shayne, from the floor, raised his gun, but the figure at the window was weaving about too rapidly for him to take careful aim. The man outside fired again. Shayne rolled sideways and fired back, the gun bucking in his grasp. The shadow vanished behind the left side of the window. Shayne leaped up and crossed the room in three long strides.

In the moonlight outside Shayne saw the dim figure of a man running away. The man was tall, and seemed to have a definite limp.

Joe Marius limped. But why would Joe Marius want to kill the red-headed Miami detective?

V

IT MADE NO SENSE to Mike Shayne as he drove through the darkness toward the small white house where Malone lived. If Marius had reappeared, Malone would be the next logical target—if Joe Marius was a killer.

But killer or not, there was no reason for Marius to try to kill Shayne. Unless the ex-cop was, indeed, insane. But then how did Marius know Shayne was in Santa Calbara? There had been something strange about the shadow at the window, something—*wrong*. Anyone could fake a limp.

One thing Shayne was sure of. Beside the police only Walter Malone knew he was in Santa Calbara. He wanted to watch the white house without being seen.

He left his car two blocks away, and moved silently up the hill through the yards of the other houses. There was a faint movement in the shadows near the white house. That would be the police guard.

More movement at the rear of the house showed Shayne where the second police guard was stationed. Once he was sure of the exact location of the guards Shayne began to creep closer.

In the house itself there was still

one light on despite the late hour. With his eye on the lighted window, Shayne crept cautiously through the bushes, his big frame moving with amazing speed and silence.

He was within ten feet of the window when Shayne had the uneasy feeling that he was not alone. But he did not hear the twig snap until it was too late.

Shayne turned sharply, but all he saw in the beam of light from the window before something smashed against his head was a small, pale face contorted with rage.

He went down. But he did not lose consciousness immediately. He was tormentingly aware that the pale face had leaned closer and was staring into his face. The man who had hit him seemed to be searching his face for something. Then the man swore softly and struck Shayne again. Shayne blacked out.

Shayne did not know how long he had been unconscious when he came to again with a strange sensation filling his mind. It was vague, hazy, but insistent. A voice seemed to be repeating, over and over, *I've seen that face . . . I've seen that face . . . I've seen that face . . .*

"You okay, Shayne?"

Shayne shook his head to clear it. Four new faces loomed indistinctly above him.

"You okay, Shayne?" someone asked, tugging at his arm.

"I've seen that face—" Suddenly Mike Shayne realized that he had been repeating the strange words himself.

"He's been mumbling like that for five minutes," a familiar voice said.

Shayne blinked upward and saw that the four men standing over him were police officers. Lieutenant Holly was the one asking if he were okay. Shayne struggled to a sitting position, his left temple throbbing with pain.

"That's better, Shayne," Lieutenant Holly said. "What hit you?"

"How'd you get here?" Shayne said thickly.

"The boys heard a noise and came and found you," Holly said. "They called me!"

"Did they see who it was?"

"No, but you know damned well it was Marius."

Shayne shook his head. "Not Marius. This was a small guy, thin-faced. I know I've seen his face before. No, wait, not *his* face. A face *like* his! That's it. There was something very familiar about his face."

"Are we playing guessing games, Shayne?" Holly said.

Shayne stood up. His knees almost buckled under his big frame, but he held onto a tree, and in a moment he felt steadier. He looked at Holly.

"Whoever it was looked at me real hard. I think he was expecting to see someone else. If I'm right,

he hit me with the butt of a forty-five, and if I'd been the right man I wouldn't be breathing."

"We are playing guessing games," Holly said.

"No, impressions. That's what detective work is, interpreting impressions, and I say this boy was after someone else. I'm alive because I was the wrong man."

"Who was the *right* man?" Holly said.

"My guess would be Joe Marius, because we're about the same build," Shayne said. "He wanted to kill Joe Marius."

"Why," Holly said.

"That's the question. Maybe he liked Stella Palmer. Maybe he was—a relative!" Shayne was frowning heavily now. "That may be it. Holly, let's go to your headquarters. There's something I'd like to check on."

Shayne turned and led the way rapidly toward the police car parked on the hill.

VI

MIKE SHAYNE held the picture of the dead woman in his big hand. He stared at the picture, and then at an incredulous Lieutenant Holly.

"Damn near dead ringers," Shayne said. "I'd say he could almost be a twin brother of Malone's wife!"

"Malone never mentioned a brother-in-law," Lieutenant Holly said.

"No, he didn't, did he?" Shayne said. "I wonder why?"

The big detective ran his thick hand through his red hair. His grey eyes were like steel probes as they stared at the picture of the dead woman. There was no doubt about it, the dead woman was related to the man who had attacked him.

Shayne looked up suddenly, a slow light growing in his eyes. "Stella what, do you know? What was her maiden name?"

Holly shrugged. "He was married when he came here."

"It's a little crazy," Shayne said, "but I've got a hunch. Let me use the phone."

Shayne looked out the window of Holly's office where the sun was just turning the sky red to the east. He picked up the telephone and gave the long distance operator the number of Chief Gentry's office in Miami. Holly stood at his elbow, frowning.

"Good thing Gentry gets to work early," Shayne said. "It'll be about eight-thirty in Miami." A voice spoke at the other end of the line and Shayne said, "Hello? I'd like to talk to Will Gentry. Mike Shayne calling!"

The redheaded detective lighted a cigarette and blew a stream of smoke into the quiet air of Holly's office as he waited.

When Gentry's voice came over the wire Shayne said, "Hello, Will? This is Mike Shayne. This may be very important. Who did Walter



Malone marry? Look it up in the file. I'll wait!"

Holly was watching Shayne with a puzzled expression on his face. The Lieutenant's eyes were dark-rimmed from lack of sleep in the long and so far fruitless search for Joe Marius.

Shayne tightened his grip on the phone. "Yes, Will!"

The voice of the Miami Chief of Police was as gruff and as puzzled as Holly's face.

"No record, Mike. Malone, or Palmer, wasn't married when he was on the force. I've started a search, but it may take a long time. We don't even know where he was married."

"Keep trying, Will. He was mar-

ried when he came here, and that was maybe nine years ago. So he must have gotten married right after he left the force."

"I'll do my best, Mike. But we haven't much to go on."

"Okay, Will. Maybe it won't matter."

Shayne hung up. He turned to Holly. The almost amazed light was still in Shayne's grey eyes.

"Get me a picture of Mario Tucci," Shayne said.

The Lieutenant buzzed his file room and gave the order. Then it hit Holly. He stared at Shayne.

"You think that Stella Palmer was Stella Tucci?"

"It woud fit," Shayne said grimly. "Joe Marius was sure the man you know as Walter Palmer had helped set up that massacre. Marius never said why he was so sure. There was no money involved that anyone could ever find. The two surviving Tucci men never talked. What if it wasn't money? What if it was love? Palmer was in love with Stella Tucci. He warned the Tucci gang about the raid.

"It could even have been an accident. He slipped and Stella found out. Or maybe he did tell, but never expected the Tucci's to wait. He told them; and expected they would just run out of the raid. But they waited instead and massacred Palmer's fellow cops! He could never tell, and later he married Stella!"

There was a knock at the door.

A policeman entered with a photograph. Holly took the picture and stared at it. Then he passed it to Shayne. It was a photograph of the small man who had attacked Shayne near the white house.

"It's Mario Tucci, all right," Shayne said. "And he's a dead ringer for Stella Palmer!"

There was a long silence in the quiet office. Outside the sun had risen above the mountains now. Holly sighed and shook his head.

"Why would Tucci kill his own sister, Shayne?"

"I don't know," Shayne said, "But this all started after Mario Tucci got out of prison. Maybe Tucci wanted Stella dead, and Malone was too scared even to protect his own wife. Maybe they were in it together."

Holly looked deeply perplexed. "But then why did Joe Marius quit the force in Miami and come out here after Malone? We know he was on to Malone and we thought we had the revenge motive figured out. But it didn't seem quite strong enough."

"Now we find that Stella Palmer is maybe Stella Tucci! That would give Marius a real motive to kill her, no doubt of that. She was in on that massacre if you've guessed right about how Malone tipped the Tuccis! There it is!"

"You could be right," Shayne said. "But, damn it, there's something that still bothers me. It's tied in with something that happened

last night when that killer tried to get me."

"Marius left Miami to get Malone," Holly said. "He came here, right?"

"Here?" Shayne said suddenly. "How do we know he came *here*? No one saw him except Malone, who was living here as Palmer. All we really know is that Marius said he'd found Malone and he left Miami for *somewhere*. If he's here, why can't you find him?"

"We'll find him," Holly said grimly.

"What if he never was here?" Shayne said. "What if Malone only invented the story to cover up. Malone set up a perfect alibi with police protection. He could have tipped Marius himself. He could have given Marius the right name, but sent him on a wild goose chase to the wrong place."

"So sooner or later we find Marius and the story doesn't hold up for Malone," Holly said. "Too much risk in it, Shayne. Besides, Malone *couldn't* have killed his wife. Remember that alibi?"

Shayne tugged hard on his earlobe.

"Damn it, there's something I've seen, but can't put into words," Shayne said.

"You're chasing rainbows, Shayne," Holly said. "Now that it looks as if Palmer did cause that massacre, you think I'm not on Marius' side? But there's still only one answer: Marius is gunning for



Malone, he killed Malone's wife, and he tried to kill you."

"Because the man who shot at me had a limp?" Shayne said. "Marius isn't the only man with a limp. If I could have seen more in the dark, got a good look at his arm, I'd have a better idea. Anyway, he was ducked behind the side of the window, and—"

Shayne stopped. His grey eyes narrowed into hard slits. He blinked the eyes, and looked at Holly.

"Did Palmer leave town just before Marius showed up?"

Holly nodded. "Walter takes a lot of trips. He sells insurance. Yeh, I think he went on his Frisco trip just before Marius showed up."

"Let me take another look at the pictures of Stella Palmer's body,

okay?" Shayne said. "The whole file—morgue, death scene, the complete report."

"Another bright idea?" Holly said.

"Maybe bright enough to break a perfect alibi!" Shayne said.

Lieutenant Holly shrugged and buzzed for his assistant. The assistant brought in the file on the Stella Palmer murder. While Shayne studied it intently, Holly called the Palmer house to tell his men to bring Palmer in. Shayne had just finished looking over the file when Holly suddenly swore.

"Damn! Stay put, I'll be over!"

The Lieutenant hung up savagely.

"Malone's skipped!" he said. "He gave my boys the slip ten minutes ago."

"Skipped?" Shayne said. "From his own protection?"

"George says he had a phone call and then pulled the shower gimmick. By the time they realized he wasn't in the shower, he had made it out through the cellar."

"A phone call?"

"Who knows? Marius maybe. Palmer's the type to try to get Marius himself!"

"Holly, what trains, busses, planes arrived this morning?" Shayne said.

"That's easy. Just one bus so far—south from Frisco. Why?"

"How long ago?"

"Maybe twenty minutes."

"Where would Palmer go, somewhere quiet where he could tell someone to meet him?!"

"He's got a beach shack about four miles up the coast. There's no one there. We checked it out."

"Let's try it!" Shayne said.

In the police car they made the four miles in a few minutes. Holly screeched the car to a halt, and Shayne and Holly ran warily toward the shack. As they reached it a small, slender man stepped out. There was a gun in his hand. When he saw them the man threw the gun to the ground. It was Mario Tucci.

"I killed him," Tucci said. "The ugly son killed my sister. But I got him."

Inside the cabin Shayne saw the body of Joe Marius stretched out on the floor. Walter Malone stood in the far corner. For an instant, Shayne was sure he saw a thin smile on Malone's face. Then Malone looked sad.

"Marius called me," Malone said. "He told me he'd give himself up if I met him. I didn't believe him, of course, so I came armed." Palmer showed the gun he was carrying. "I told Mario. I guess that was wrong. Mario thought a lot of Stella."

Lieutenant Holly came into the shack. He looked down at the body of Joe Marius.

"So your wife was Stella Tucci," Holly said. "I guess Marius knew that. He's got a gun in his hand,

Shayne. Tucci pleads self defense. He'll go back for breaking parole anyway."

Shayne said nothing. The big detective was staring down at the body of Joe Marius, the gun clenched in the right hand, the left arm stiff and crippled.

"Well," Holly said, "I guess that does it. I'm not sure you didn't deserve to get killed, Malone. You did tip off the Tucci's, didn't you."

"I was in love, Holly," Malone said. "I didn't mean to hurt anyone. I thought the gang would cut and run when I warned them. Sure, I loved Stella and I warned her brothers, but I didn't know they'd wait and massacre them all! All right, I made a mistake, a bad one. But I've paid. I was a good cop, and I liked being a cop. It was my whole life. I lost it all. All I had left was Stella. I paid, damn it!"

Shayne was still staring down at the dead body of Joe Marius.

"Maybe he's right," Shayne said. "Maybe he has paid for that mistake. I guess this wraps it up. Tucci did you a big favor, Malone."

"It was worth it," Mario Tucci snarled. "So I go back, she was my sister. We had plans!"

"What about that brainstorm you were having, Shayne?" Holly said.

"I guess it doesn't matter now," Shayne said.

"Yeh, you can go home now," Holly said.



Shayne nodded, but he still stood there looking down at the body of Joe Marius.

VII

IT WAS TWO weeks later when Walter Malone walked out of his house and got into his car. The stocky man seemed to check carefully to make sure he was alone. Satisfied, he drove away down the hill and turned left on Freemont Street. He drove toward the mountains.

Malone drove slowly, and continually checked his rearview mirror. No one was following him. To make sure, though, he made many turns into side roads, and stopped short in blind hiding places. No one was following.

After some time, with all the stops and starts, Malone drove up into the mountains and over the Pass. Just beyond the summit of the Pass, he made a sharp left turn into a narrow dirt road. He continued on for a mile. Then he

switched off the ignition, parked and left the car.

He walked away from the road and into the bushes. He worked his way cautiously through the trees and underbrush until he came near a small shack completely hidden by the dense foliage. When he was within a few yards of the shack, he took a long-barrelled pistol from his pocket, checked it, cocked it, and moved forward again.

As he reached the shack and crouched down, a car came slowly down the side road and came to an abrupt halt.

A man got out. The man was tall, and he had a decided limp in his left leg. He carried an ugly, snub-nosed pistol in his left hand. He moved warily toward the shack.

When he had almost reached it Malone suddenly stood up and aimed his pistol at him. The man did not see Malone.

"Look out!" Someone shouted.

The shout seemed to echo in the sun and heat. The tall man with the limp jerked his head around and his eyes widened in sudden horror. Voices were shouting all around the shack now.

Malone fired. The tall man twisted and went down. Malone turned to run. He ran ten feet and saw a burly figure in front of him. He raised his gun. A giant fist crashed into his face.

Malone lay unconscious in the

dirt. Mike Shayne stood over him.

"Over here, Holly," Shayne called.

Lieutenant Holly walked toward Shayne from where he and his men had been bending over the other man.

"That one's still breathing," Holly said. "But not for long. We were lucky. My yell made Malone miss dead center."

"Will he live long enough to talk?" Shayne asked.

"He's talking already," Holly replied, his face grim. "Chapter and verse, Shayne. He says if he's got to go he'll make sure Malone goes with him. His gun looks like the weapon that killed Malone's wife. We'll know for sure after ballistics works on it. Luckily he still had it."

"Hired killers are like pros in any field," Shayne said. "They have their favorite tools. I counted on that."

"Doesn't matter, he's singing," Holly said. "Name's Petrus—Lefty Petrus from Seattle."

"Malone must have hired him when he went to Seattle to call Marius and send him on the wild-goose chase," Shayne said. "I figured an ex-cop, and a friend of the Tuccis, would have connections all over."

Holly looked down to where Walter Malone was beginning to come awake. The stocky ex-cop moaned as he opened his eyes. There was a sudden look of fear, and then he seemed to shrug where

he lay, as if suddenly resigned to the end of his plans.

"You know, Shayne," Holly said, "I really didn't believe you at all. I thought you were crazy. I let you put that signal on Malone's car so we could follow out of sight just to show you up. But you were right, and I was wrong. I'm sorry about Marius."

"It had to be someone we didn't even know about," Shayne said. "There was no one in the case who was left-handed."

VIII

HOURS LATER, as Walter Malone sat in Holly's office with his head in his hands, making his confession, the policeman named George McWhorters stared at Shayne.

"Left-handed?" McWhorters said. "How did you figure that out, Shayne?"

"You should have figured it yourself," Shayne said. "How did you get that bruise on your head?"

The policeman touched the bruise on the right side of his head. In silent pantomime, George McWhorters stood very still, turned his head to his left, and nodded in realization.

"You see," Shayne told him, "you turned to your left to look behind you. When they are threatened that way most right-handed men turn left. It gives them more freedom to defend themselves with their right hands. If a man was

standing directly behind you, and you turned to your left to look, he couldn't hit the right side of your head unless he was left-handed.

"Then there was the window. When Petrus shot at me, he hid behind the *left side* of my window to hide his body. Only a left-handed man could do that and still fire at me around the window frame. Try it sometime.

"And Malone's wife was shot in the right side of her head," Shayne went on. "The bullet came out through her left temple. The killer was right in front of her. You reported that yourself from mudprints on the rug. From the angle of the bullet's path, she couldn't have turned her head. Only a left-handed man could have fired a bullet in that path. There was no other way of explaining it."

"When I added up all three of those facts, I knew it had to be more than coincidence. Our killer was left-handed. Marius had a crippled left arm. Malone and Tucci were both right-handed. Stella didn't commit suicide; there was no gun on the death scene. It had to be some left-handed man we didn't know about."

"Only with Marius dead, and Malone free with no proof against him except my guesswork, I had to catch him with his hired killer. If we'd accused him two weeks ago, he would just have laughed at us. I figured there had to be a payoff meeting. So Holly bugged Ma-

lone's car with that signal we could follow out of sight.

"I even figured Malone would try to kill his hired gunman instead of paying him off. It would be dangerous to let Petrus live. Good thing we got there in time."

As Shayne had been talking, Malone had slowly raised his head to look at the big redhead. Now the ex-cop licked his dry lips, and his eyes widened as he looked at Shayne.

"She was going to leave me, you see?" he said. "After all I'd done! She was going to walk out with that rat of a brother! I got my friends killed for her! I crippled my own partner! I lost everything for nothing except her and she was going to walk out on me. She never loved me. She just used me. All the time she just used me until Mario got out, and she didn't need me any more! After all I'd done!"

Like a trapped and despairing animal, Malone turned his head from side to side to look at the faces of everyone around him in the silent room. Then the stocky ex-cop began to cry.

"So you called Marius," Shayne said, "and told him you were in Seattle. Then you hired Lefty Petrus. I don't suppose you ever even thought about him being left-handed, and Marius having a crippled left arm.

"He killed Stella for you, and had a shot at me. Only you had to give the police Marius. So you called him again and got him to come down here. You had Petrus watching the bus depot. He called you and you went down and kidnapped Marius.

"Tucci just walked in and killed Marius. You'd have done it yourself anyway and pleaded self-defense. You might have gotten away with it. It was a pretty good plan with that alibi and no motive for killing Stella. Marius was a perfect fall guy. You even had Tucci fooled. You better pray you get the gas chamber. When Tucci finds out who really killed his sister, I'd hate to be you and still be alive."

Malone said nothing. The stocky man just sat there and cried into his hands. Shayne turned away and walked out of the office.

Next Month—ANOTHER NEW MIKE SHAYNE THRILLER

THE MILK-RUN MURDER

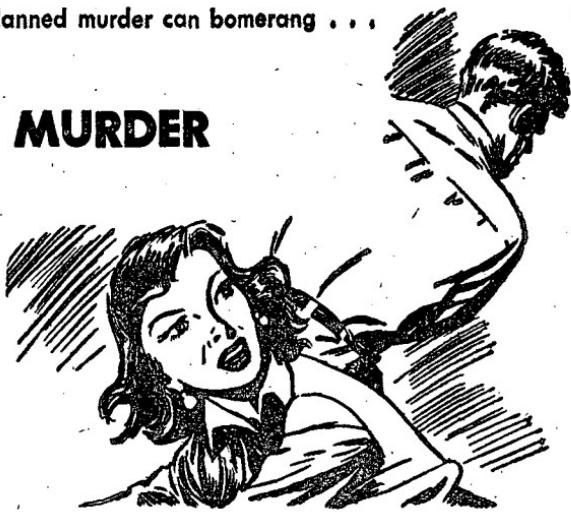
By BRETT HALLIDAY

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Even a superlatively planned murder can bomerang . . .

A BETTER MURDER

by
DENNIS
LYNDS



THE PLEASURE Paul Kasters experienced when he first decided to murder Fred Merwin did not surprise him. Paul hated his brother-in-law with a long and beautiful hatred that was all the stronger for having been so carefully hidden for twenty years. To Paul, the violent end of his brother-in-law would be like a rare steak to a starving man.

In his small office at the foundry—Fred, of course, had the big office—Paul grinned with wolfish joy at the precise instant when the sudden death of Fred Merwin's wife Frieda turned murder into a profitable undertaking for the first time.

"I'm so sorry, Fred old man," Paul sympathized, "Frieda was a fine woman. A tragic loss, and so sudden. We had no idea she was seriously ill."

"She was the best, Paul," Fred Merwin said, the tears in his eyes. "We didn't want to worry Phyllis. She was all I had."

"You have Phyllis and me," Paul said with a tragic air.

"You've both been a great help. I appreciate it."

"What are a sister, and a brother-in-law for, after all?" Paul said with just the right catch in his voice.

For many men, perhaps, twenty years of subservient hatred might

have been sufficient motive for murder. But Paul was not a man to act without a more tangible profit than simple satisfaction. After all, it had not been satisfaction that had made him marry Fred Merwin's sister Phyllis in the first place. Not that Phyllis had been unattractive twenty years ago. Still, from the practical aspect, the marriage had not returned much on Paul's investment.

That mistake had cost Paul Kasters twenty years of galling existence in the shadow of his peerless brother-in-law. Fred had taken him into the foundry business, of course, but he had remained little more than a glorified hired hand. It was always Fred who made the lucrative contracts, Fred who made the foundry run. And if Paul was not constantly aware of the superiority of his brother-in-law, Phyllis was there to remind him.

"Fred has really done a wonderful job. You should be grateful, Paul," Phyllis was fond of saying as she sat in the living room with her middle-aged hands crossed complacently in her middle-aged lap.

"He could listen to me once in a damn while!" Paul snapped.

"It is his business, Paul."

Twenty years of that, but Paul would not have thought of murder, not seriously, if Frieda Merwin had not suddenly died. In less than a month after Frieda's death

Fred had changed his insurance policy and his will. The new beneficiary of the \$250,000 insurance policy was, quite properly, Fred's only living relative, his sister Phyllis Kasters. California, where they all lived, was a community property state.

What would come to his wife on the death of Fred Merwin, would also come to Paul.

Then, of course, there was the foundry. By the change in good old Fred's will, the business would come to Paul now that Frieda was gone. Luckily, now that poor Frieda had passed to her reward, Fred believed that a man should have the business.

The third, and by no means least tempting, aspect of the matter was the imminent possibility of escaping the middle-aged presence of Phyllis. After twenty-odd years of living with Phyllis, in the mistaken hope that Fred Merwin would make him a full partner, the thought of being free again was most pleasant.

Paul was not sure whether he would send Phyllis down the same fatal path as her brother, or simply divorce her after a suitable time. Paul was not greedy, and yet it was hard to settle for half if he could get it all.

However, Paul decided to defer this decision. He had a far more important problem on his mind. Soon after he had decided to kill Fred Merwin, his profit already daz-

zlingly in front of his eyes, he became unpleasantly aware of a flaw. His motive would be ridiculously obvious.

With the possible exception of his dear wife, Phyllis, no one would gain by the death of his brother-in-law except himself.

Faced with this technical problem, Paul Kasters began to pore over the more important books on murder in the Los Angeles Public Library. Unfortunately, in murder it seemed that only the failures achieved fame and public recognition. Undetected murders were sadly lacking, for obvious reasons. And the main cause of failure seemed to be too obvious a motive.

It was all very discouraging to Paul. It seemed that he would have to abandon his dreams of wealth and freedom, since he had no intention of being caught.

Then, at the lowest ebb of his eager spirits, Paul found the book. It was an innocent-looking volume entitled, *Unknown Murders*.

Paul had read only a few pages when he became excited. It was not a book of known murders like the others. It was a book of violent deaths that could have resulted from foul play, but which had never been proven to be murders!

They had all been "accidents!"

They were not the usual "accident-murders" that employed some complicated scheme de-

signed to provide the killer with an alibi, and to keep even the slightest suspicion from arising. Those schemes always failed. The instant the police suspected that the death was not an accident, the killer was invariably trapped by his own stupidity.

No, these "accidents" were different. From the start each case could have been either accident or murder—both equally possible, but no actual proof of either! And since, as *Unknown Murders* pointed out, a man was innocent until proven guilty, in every case the verdict had been "death by accident," no matter how strong a motive for murder the killer may have had.

The book described the classic case. Killer and victim alone in a dark place. There is a brick, or stone, at hand. The killer picks up the brick and strikes his victim. Then the killer runs into the light calling for help. He says that the dead man fell and struck his head. It was an "accident."

His motive, method, and opportunity are clear. There are no hidden facts. There is nothing for the police to look for. If it is murder, there is only the one suspect. If it is an accident, there is only one witness. It is the killer's word against the police, and without a witness the police can prove nothing!

Given two equally possible choices, murder or accident, with-

out a shred of proof, with no hidden facts to be found out, the verdict must be accident.

Paul almost kissed the book. *Unknown Murders!* It was the way—and a foundry was a dangerous place for "accidents." To be sure he took the book home and studied it from cover to cover for weeks. There was no flaw in the method, as long as no one saw the crime committed.

Paul Kasters began to study his brother-in-law's habits. He found, and discarded, many possibilities. He finally decided on a fall from one of the cab-cranes in the foundry. These cab-cranes moved on tracks above the foundry floor. The cranes carried castings from machine to machine, and were operated from cabs directly above the cranes themselves.

The cabs were entered from small, un-railed platforms set against the walls one-story up in the towering foundry room. These platforms were reached through doors in the sidewalls.

It was Fred Merwin's habit to make an aerial inspection from one of the cabs three times a day. Fred entered the cab through a door in his own second-floor office. Fred made his last inspection at exactly 4:35 each day just as the work-shift changed.

Four men had fallen from these platforms over the years. None had been killed. The fall was not that far. But directly beneath the

door Fred Merwin used was the giant milling machine with its grinding gears and sharp cutting tools.

Of course, the danger of the platforms was well known. They doors opened outward and locked against the cab, affording a protective wall and handhold on one side for support. When the cab was at the platform the heavy door was free to swing all the way open. But when the cab was not at the platform, the door locked closed automatically.

When the door was properly locked while the crane-cab was not in its place outside, a red light glowed clearly above the door. When the door was not locked, the cab in place for entry, a green light glowed above the door. All-in-all an extremely fair system of safety devices—an all-automatic system which everyone trusted.

It took Paul no more than a few days research to find the flaws in the system. Like most automatic mechanisms, the locking device could easily jam if dirt got into it. Paul found that it had actually happened once before, so that a precedent had been established.

But the major flaw in the system was that the warning lights did not operate from the crane-cab, but from the lock! *If the lock was open, the light glowed green, no matter where the cab was.*

It was a simple case of over-de-

pendence on automation. Paul Kasters felt quite grateful to the unknown designer of the system.

The next step, to impress on his potential after-the-fact witnesses that Fred was distraught and not himself these days, was far simpler. He noted with satisfaction that Fred actually did seem distracted. Fred often went through the door without really looking at the lights, and seemed unaware sometimes of people who spoke to him.

"I'm really worried," Paul remarked casually to various workmen. "Since Frieda died he seems to go about in a kind of daze at times."

The last step, to blow enough dirt and metal dust into the lock to jam it open, was child's play. When he used an air-blower, the lock jammed open, the light glowed green, and the crane-cab was nowhere near the high platform.

At precisely 4:32 on a Wednesday afternoon, Paul stepped into the office of his brother-in-law, locked the office door behind him, walked smiling up to Fred, and struck him hard once on the head with a large cutting tool removed only minutes before from the milling machine on the floor below. Fred Merwin dropped without a sound.

Paul hoisted the limp body of his brother-in-law, carried it to the unlocked door with the green light



glowing above it, opened the door, and shouted once loud and clear: "Look out, Fred! Look out!"

On the foundry floor below, the men of the night shift, just now walking to their work stations, saw the body of Fred Merwin hurtle through the air and fall with a sickening sound of grinding metal into the giant milling machine. At the open door above, where the

crane-cab should have been, the men saw Paul Kasters shouting down at them.

By the time the operator shut off the milling machine there was nothing left of Fred Merwin but torn flesh and crushed bones.

PAUL KASTERS held his wife tightly. Phyllis was sobbing in his arms. Paul had, of course, called Phyllis immediately, and now, the mangled body of Fred Merwin removed, Phyllis sobbed in his arms while the police swarmed over the office and foundry.

"Don't cry, darling," Paul said. "Please, don't. There's nothing we can do, please now. Poor Fred."

"How could it have happened?" Phyllis sobbed. "How?"

"I tried to stop him, Phyllis," Paul said, his voice choked with grief. "I called. I ran to him. I almost reached him in time."

"No . . . no . . . no . . ." Phyllis sobbed in Paul's arms.

Paul comforted his wife, stroking her heaving shoulders, but his mind was not on his wife. His eyes, and his mind, were on the police. The Detective Lieutenant, who had said his name was Jacoby, was standing in the doorway to the narrow little platform from which Fred Merwin had fallen. Jacoby was watching his men work over the door and the lock.

Two other policemen were searching Fred Merwin's desk, studying the office floor, dusting

everything in sight for finger-prints. The Coroner had finished his work, and with his first worry behind him, Paul watched and waited. His first worry, of course, had been the marks of the blow on the head. Fred Merwin's head had been crushed beyond recognition, and the cutting tool had gone down into the machine with the body.

Phyllis had calmed somewhat—enough for Paul to guide her to a chair and make her sit down—when Lieutenant Jacoby turned to Paul.

"All right, Kasters," Jacoby said, "let's hear it again."

"A terrible thing, Lieutenant," Paul said. "Poor Fred, he must have been so distraught he became careless. So soon after losing Frieda. A terrible tragedy."

"Frieda?" Jacoby said.

"His wife," Paul explained, "she died only a month ago."

"I see," Jacoby said. "All right, now tell me once more just what happened."

Paul was aware that they were watching him closely. As he had expected, they were somewhat suspicious of him already, despite the fact that they had not yet found out about the insurance and the will. Even Phyllis was watching him. It was all going according to plan. Paul wiped his eyes sadly, tragically. His voice was nicely unsteady as he spoke.

"I'm not sure I can really tell

you. It all happened so fast, in just a split second," Paul said. It is normal for an accident witness to be hazy and unsure of just what he has seen. Paul intended to be sure that *all* his versions were not identical. In a real accident there would be hazy versions.

"I came in to make my usual evening report. Fred was behind the desk where he always was before his last inspection trip in the crane-cab. I gave him the report, but he didn't read it immediately. It's still there on the desk.

"I remember thinking that that was strange, I should have realized Fred was upset. You see, he always read my report at once. I should have noticed! I might have been prepared! Poor Fred, in a way it was all my fault."

Paul produced an excellent catch in his voice at this point. He let his head droop in a classic posture of self-blame. One of the foremen from the foundry took the bait beautifully.

"You can't blame yourself, Mr. Kasters. Maybe if we'd got to that machine faster . . ."

"No," Paul said bravely. "If I'd noticed, if I hadn't spoken to him just as he started through that door!"

"You spoke to him?" Lieutenant Jacoby said. "That was convenient. Where were you?"

"Across the room," Paul said, "near the door into the hall. You see, when I gave him my report,

and he didn't read it right away I started to leave. It was very unusual for him not to read my report right away.

"He started toward the crane-cab door for his usual inspection trip. The light was green. He opened the door and started through. If only I hadn't spoken to him!"

Again Paul let his voice sound filled with guilty grief. From the expressions on all their faces it seemed to be quite effective. The men from the foundry shop were looking especially sympathetic.

"He turned when I spoke, you see," Paul went on sadly. "He had actually started through the door when I spoke. I had remembered something in my report I wanted him to see at once—the low inventory on cutting tools for the milling machine, to be exact.

"I spoke, and he sort of half-turned toward me. But he didn't stop walking out through that door. He went on, without seeing where he was going! He must have been in a fog; you know? Thinking of poor Frieda, I suppose.

"Just as I spoke, and he turned, I saw that the crane-cab wasn't in place! There was nothing but open air. I shouted! I ran toward him. I tried to save him. I tried!"

Paul wiped his eyes. "But he was too far out. That door is heavy, and when it swung all the way it actually pulled him out.

We stopped the machine, but it was too late. It was all my fault!"

As he finished, there was a silence in the office. His own voice, Paul was well aware, had set a tragic tone, and they were all feeling it. Even Phyllis was staring fixedly at him. He smiled wanly to her, but she only stared.

"You spoke to him?" Phyllis said. "He turned toward you when you spoke?"

"Yes, I blame myself! I shouldn't have distracted him!"

"You might as well blame the machine," the foundry foreman said comfortingly. "If he'd fallen anywhere else he'd maybe just busted a leg or an arm. We all heard you try to warn him, Mr. Kasters. It was real terrible; him falling, and screaming, and trying to save himself. We all saw you run up after he went over. Don't blame yourself, Mr. Kasters."

Paul came very close to laughing. He had counted on the fact that eye-witnesses were notorious for imagining things. They responded quite nicely to suggestion. Actually, of course, the foreman and the others had seen and heard nothing but Fred Merwin's falling body and Paul's shouted warning.

They only thought they had seen the rest. But they would swear forever that they had seen just what Paul had described.

Soon after, the police let Paul take Phyllis home. She was silent

all the way. Her silence was only natural, of course, for she had thought a lot of her brother. Paul was not even surprised at the way she still stared at him. She probably still blamed him for distracting Fred, but that would pass. There were other, more vital problems which were sure to arise in the weeks ahead, and he must be prepared to cope with them well in advance and not delude himself with a false sense of security.

As he had anticipated, the moment the police discovered who got Fred's insurance, and who had fallen heir to the business, they took a great deal more interest in him. Three men escorted him to the dim office of Lieutenant Jacoby. There Jacoby, and two other detectives, questioned him off and on for three days. It was hard, gruelling, and annoying. But he had expected it.

"You get the money and the business," Jacoby said. "That's a pretty good motive for pushing him over."

"My wife gets the money."
"Same thing in this state. Is that why you did it?"

"It was a terrible accident, Lieutenant," Paul said.

"How did dirt get in that lock?"
"I can't imagine," Paul said.
"There is a lot of dirt and metal dust in a foundry. I don't suppose it ever happened before, though?"
"You know damned well it hap-

pened before. It's in your plant records!"

"We must do something to prevent it happening again," Paul said. "I'll have to see to that."

"Now that you've got the foundry?" Jacoby said.

"I'll never forgive myself for not jumping in time, you know? Never! I could have saved him, perhaps."

"You killed him, Kasters!" one of the other cops said.

"He fell," Paul said. "A terrible accident. I saw it all. I was the only one who saw it, wasn't I?"

"All right, Kasters, let's go over it again," Jacoby said.

They were admirably persistent, the police, but after three days they were forced to give up. They had no proof at all. Paul smiled sympathetically when they finally released him. He had been most cooperative. He had not even called a lawyer.

"I want to cooperate," Paul explained to Jacoby. "You have your job. But, you see, there simply isn't anything to tell, is there? Nothing happened out of normal routine. The men in the shop saw it all. You found no evidence of tampering on that door, or even near it. There was nothing to find. It was just an accident, Lieutenant."

Paul went home considerably pleased with himself. He was well aware that the police would not shelve the case just yet. But they

had nothing to go on, and, better still, unlike many murderers he had no reason to be cautious with his ill-gotten gains. The money was all his the instant the inquest verdict was accidental death. Or, more accurately, his wife's. But that would soon be taken care of.

Phyllis seemed to revive somewhat after the money was paid, and Paul began his negotiations for a divorce. He contacted a lawyer in Tijuana, Mexico. He did not, naturally, tell Phyllis about his plans. He played the kindly husband all the way; there would be enough trouble after he started proceedings in Mexico. He even refrained from talking about the "accident," although he treasured his success in secret.

After the money had been paid Paul was working one night at home on plans for the foundry when Phyllis surprised him by saying:

"I think I'll drive up to Santa Barbara and visit Frieda's family, Paul. They took it very hard. First Frieda, and then poor Fred. Both of them so close together. And we get all the money, and the business."

"I don't like to think about that," Paul said sadly.

"He was always so careful," Phyllis said. "Such an incredibly stupid accident."

"If I only hadn't distracted him," Paul said.

"Still, I really can't imagine him

not looking where he was going. It must have been his grief over Frieda," Phyllis said.

"Yes, I suppose so," Paul agreed.

"The police even suspected you, didn't they, dear?"

"Can you blame them?" Paul said with fine honesty. "After all, I had the motive, and I was the only one there. In fact, I sometimes think you're not sure."

It had occurred to Paul that later, after the divorce, he would say that he felt she blamed him for her brother's death, and life became intolerable with her.

"Paul! How can you say that. I know you wouldn't hurt Fred. Why, I know murder would never cross your mind!"

That was the last time Phyllis referred to Fred's death for months. Then, one night after she had returned from the trip to Santa Barbara, she spoke of the money.

"We're almost rich, aren't we? What shall we do with the money?"

"Something solid," Paul said. "Fred would have wanted that. A new house perhaps. Expand the foundry. But, you know, I think we could use a trip. It's been an awful strain on both of us. How about Mexico?"

He said it casually, but it had occurred to him that it would look good to have her on the trip to Mexico with him. He had already started a Mexican lawyer working

on the divorce while Phyllis had been in Santa Barbara.

"Mexico?" Phyllis said. "Well, I could use a rest. Yes, we could drive down the coast road to Tijuana, and then down through Lower California, and take the ferry across to the mainland and go to Mexico City."

"We'll go in a week, how's that?" Paul said.

He needed the week to alert the Mexican lawyer to be ready. Her idea of Tijuana was just what he needed. The rest of the trip she could make alone if she was in a mind to.

"A week is fine," Phyllis said.

But three days later, Paul found reason to make a sudden change in the schedule. He became aware that he was being followed and watched. There were two men. One of them was Lieutenant Jacoby!

WHAT HAD gone wrong?

Paul lay awake at night wondering if he could have blundered in any way. Surely nothing could have gone wrong. And yet there they were, the police, watching the house and following him. Had he made some tiny mistake? He was aware that no one was perfect.

Still, he could not believe that some minor error could harm him. His whole story of the accident had been vague. He had made sure of that. Too many killers had been suspected because their

stories had been too accurate, too consistent. There was always confusion in a real accident.

No, he was sure a minor error could not hurt him. But he decided it might be best to take the trip at once, if only to ease his nerves.

"Today?" Phyllis said when he suggested the change. "Well, why not? I thought there were some business matters you had to attend to first."

"They'll have to wait," Paul said. "I've decided we need the rest now."

It was a fine, sunny drive down the coast highway. Paul drove his new convertible with the top down all the way. The convertible was his first extravagance with his new wealth.

Phyllis seemed in good spirits, and Paul thoroughly enjoyed the drive. They stopped for lunch at an elegant roadside restaurant on the high cliffs above the Pacific just north of San Diego.

After lunch they continued south toward Tijuana. Paul had decided to drive straight through, in case Jacoby had any ideas of following. Mexico seemed a reasonable precaution, in case he had made some small mistake.

Phyllis agreed with enthusiasm. But just as they passed through a small town high on the cliffs at the edge of the sea, she suddenly developed a migraine headache. She bravely said they should drive on,

but Paul became solicitous. He did not want to seem over-anxious, and decided to stay the night in the small town.

"I really am quite ill," Phyllis said.

The town turned out to have only one motel. It was perched on a craggy cliff above a rocky beach. The buildings were old. Unlike the new individual unit motels, this one had two barrack-like structures with rooms like cells that opened off a central hall. They were at the very edge of the cliff, and a small path led down to the beach.

Phyllis went straight to bed, but the long drive had made Paul hungry, and he dined at the motel restaurant, which turned out to be first-rate. The view out over the Pacific was magnificent.

Paul lingered over his brandy after dinner, enjoying the sound of the surf on the rocky beach below, and gazing out over the sweeping vista from the cliff.

He was savoring this first real taste of the luxury he could begin to expect when he saw the policeman. It was Jacoby, and there was a stranger with him who wore the uniform of the local police.

For the first time since he had watched the inert form of Fred Merwin hurtle into the grinding gears of the milling machine, Paul had a sudden twinge of fear. If Jacoby would follow him this far, he must know something!

Taking a grip on his nerves, Paul walked casually, and unseen, from the restaurant. He hurried across the parking lot to his room. They would, of course, have seen his car. But they had not rushed in to arrest him, which they certainly would have done if they'd had sufficient evidence to justify an arrest. He still had time.

In the room he awakened Phyllis.

"Honey, let's drive on. If you feel well enough now."

She smiled. "As a matter of fact, I do."

"Fine," Paul said. "Get dressed, and we'll go."

"I do feel a bit groggy from sleep, dear," Phyllis said. "Perhaps we could take a swim first."

"At night?"

"Of course, it's the best time."

"Well, put on your suit, and we'll stop somewhere on the road."

"All right, Paul," she said.

Once in the car, and on the road, Paul felt better. He thought he had seen Jacoby just as they drove away. But he was not sure, and no one seemed to be following them.

Less than a mile away, Phyllis pointed to a small beach surrounded by rocks out in the water.

"That looks nice, Paul."

"Too small," Paul said. "We'll drive for awhile."

"But I feel so sleepy, dear," Phyllis said, and added, "I'd almost think you were afraid of

something, running from something. You're driving awfully fast. I almost think you want to get to Mexico in a hurry."

It immediately occurred to Paul that it would not be good for Phyllis to tell the police that he had seemed scared. If they had found some small clue, his being afraid would look bad. If she became suspicious, he would have to kill her, too, and he did not want to do that with Jacoby so close.

It also occurred to Paul that if he drove the car far enough off the road, and if the Lieutenant had decided to follow him there was a good chance that Jacoby would be thrown completely off the trail.

"Okay, dear," he said, pulling off the road. "We'll swim here then. It does look good."

They left the car, and, wearing their bathing suits, walked down to the water. Paul stood looking out at the dark sea and the rocks in the night. If he had wanted to kill Phyllis, this would be a good spot. As his book, *Unknown Murders*, said, there were the two of them, and there were many rocks lying about.

"Well," Paul said, "let's get wet!"

He dived in, carefully avoiding the rocks, and came up a few yards out. Phyllis swam close behind him. She seemed to be laboring, having a hard time swimming. What if she drowned?! Another

accident might be hard to explain! In the dark night Paul swam to her. He noticed, vaguely, that she was swimming with only one arm. She was still in fairly shallow water. As he reached her, he stood up on the sand and sharp rocks of the bottom. He was about to ask her what was wrong when he saw, in the direction of the highway, the lights of a car.

The lights stopped moving. The car had stopped just short of the spot where he had parked his own car! Jacoby!

Then he sensed, rather than saw, his wife's arm come up—the arm she had been holding beneath the water. He stared at her in sudden alarm. There was a large, jagged rock in her hand.

The rock smashed against his head. He went down. He fought to the surface. She struck again. Just as unconsciousness closed blackly over him, just as he felt himself sink beneath the water, he heard her voice.

"Help! Help! Oh, God, help! Help!"

That was the last thing Paul Kasters ever heard.

A WEEK LATER, when Lieutenant Jacoby called on her, Phyllis Kasters was wearing an elegant new black dress.

"Accidental death," Jacoby said. "That was the verdict. He hit his head against the rocks and drowned, just as you said."

"Poor Paul," Phyllis said. "And I thought he was going to try to kill me. I suspected him of killing Fred! I feel awful."

"So you told us," Jacoby said dryly. "That's why we watched him, to protect you. I wonder if we should have protected him? We were very convenient when you started calling for help."

"Are you implying something, Lieutenant? If you are, you may as well tell me."

"He was going to divorce you. We know that now. The motel proprietor said a woman very much like you drove down some time before and looked over the beaches. If he had divorced you, you would only have gotten half the money."

"Now I get it all," Phyllis said. "I'm very lucky. Two such terrible accidents."

"Yes," Jacoby said. "Bad accidents."

"Is that all, Lieutenant? I have some errands to run for poor Paul. Some unfinished business."

"Yes, that's all."

An hour later Phyllis Kasters walked into the library. She held a book out to the librarian.

"I think my husband forgot to return this book," Phyllis Kasters said.

The librarian took the book. The title, embossed in gold on the cover, was *Unknown Murders*.

"It was a very interesting book," Phyllis said.

There was a guilty secret in Peter's life . . . and guilt can exact a terrible price.

Still Life

by

FRANK
BELKNAP
LONG



MISS MAGNON SAID, "Come in, Peter, I've been expecting you."

Peter Warde nodded and stepped into the hallway of Miss

Magnon's big white house. Nothing about Miss Magnon or what Peter could see of the house had changed since he'd been away, and that surprised him a little.

He knew, of course, that women like Miss Magnon could remain practically ageless while less fortunate people were growing old all around them. She was the dour spinster type, with just enough physical attractiveness left to take the curse off and make the average male willing to bet that she had been extremely beautiful in her youth.

Still . . . it seemed to Peter that she should have looked a trifle older. A few more gray hairs, at least . . . a further tightening of her lips and a deepening of the tiny, barely noticeable crows' feet about her eyes. The skillful application of beauty aids might have deceived Peter in that respect, if he hadn't remembered how much she had disliked beauty parlors and magic formulas.

He gave up trying to explain it and bent all of his efforts to maintaining his composure. He had never felt so ill at ease in her presence, so disturbingly unsure of himself.

"It's been six long years, hasn't it, Peter?" Miss Magnon asked, smiling at him in the dim hall light.

"Yes, ma'am," Peter said.

"You were the best gardener I ever had, Peter. When I got your letter I just couldn't believe you were really serious about wanting to work for me again. And coming when it did—at exactly the

right time. Will miracles never cease?"

Peter looked into the smiling gray eyes and wondered how she could say that. Had she forgotten the Colonial period chair he'd picked up and almost hurled at her when she'd goaded him beyond endurance with recriminations so spiteful that his temples had swelled to bursting and he'd lost control of his voice? Or the time he'd gripped her by the shoulders, backed her up against the living room wall and slapped her on both cheeks? The long gray face had lost its pallor then, had flamed scarlet with a fury that had matched his own.

Twice he had come close to killing her, and now she was telling him that his return was a miracle and looking overjoyed.

It could only mean, Peter told himself, that there was no accounting for the emotional vagaries of a woman like Miss Magnon. He hadn't entertained much hope of getting his old job back. But when a man could turn his pockets inside out and not hear a dime drop risking a grievous affront to his pride was certainly smarter than sleeping on a bench beneath an equestrian statue dating back to the Civil War.

He followed her down the long hallway and into the living room, noticing that she held herself in the same stiff, uncompromising way, as if she wanted him to know

that she would still be quick to resent the kind of behavior she had refused to countenance in the past.

That was *really* a laugh. During the three years he'd worked for her he'd taken a few liberties solely to embarrass her. It had amused him to see her turn pale, eye him with indignation and retreat to her room, slamming and bolting the door. He had never been tempted to make a serious pass at her, but she'd had no way of knowing that.

Miss Magnon was frowning slightly now, as if his callous contempt for her had been visible in his eyes just long enough to make her doubt the wisdom of continuing to smile.

"Sit down, Peter," she said, gesturing toward a chair which was the exact duplicate of the one he'd almost hurled at her a month before their final quarrel. "We've a few things to discuss, so you may as well make yourself comfortable."

Peter sat down and did his best to look as deferential as he had when she'd greeted him at the door. But almost immediately he had the feeling that he wasn't succeeding too well, for she continued to frown in so disturbing a manner that he experienced a slight twinge of uneasiness and let his gaze travel to the full-length portrait in oils which hung directly above the fireplace at the far end of the room.

The painting was that of a girl of eighteen or twenty, with a willowy kind of pale beauty that had always brought a catch to Peter's throat. It was forty years old at least and in the Roaring 'Twenties plunging necklines hadn't gone quite all out. But there is a seductiveness, mothproof and imperishable, which the years can not corrode, and though Peter would have been almost inarticulate if confronted by a vision of loveliness in the flesh one-tenth as miraculously posed his thoughts could soar surprisingly at times and leave him a little stunned. They were soaring again now.

"Peter, you've always admired that portrait, but never so much as now," Miss Magnon said, shattering the spell. "Be honest for once in your life, and admit that you are unable to think of her as dead."

Peter could only nod, for his throat felt suddenly dry. Miss Magnon was looking at him now in an almost accusing way, as if she had caught him glancing covertly at her ankles, and feared that he was letting his thoughts stray to forbidden areas where concupiscence had no right to intrude.

"You do admire her, I'm sure," Miss Magnon persisted. "Beauty like that is rare."

"She—she must have been quite a girl," Peter conceded, finding his voice at last.

"Yes, Peter . . . quite a girl. And every hour of every day you worshipped her, didn't you? While you were wishing me dead! Oh, I know you so well."

"Ma'am, I don't see—"

"You will, Peter. You've never really understood or appreciated me. I like strong men, Peter—cruel, harsh, demanding men. You have to hate to love in a cruel, demanding way. That's what I've always liked about you. There is so much meanness, viciousness, spite in you. You hated me so much you could have loved me in the same cruel way—if I had looked like her!"

"Ma'am," Peter said, almost pleadingly, "I wrote to you because I really do need my old job back."

"Of course you do, Peter. And you'll get it back. We'll be together again in a most unusual way. It will be even better than before."

It seemed to Peter Warde that Miss Magnon was smiling again, but he couldn't be sure. It could just as easily have been a look of venomous hate she was directing at him with a slight twisting of her lips.

"Peter, you never asked me who that girl was," she went on accusingly. "Why, Peter? Was it because most people take family portraits for granted or because you felt that a pointblank question would have been . . . an encroachment on privacy? You al-

ways were so sensitive and perceptive, Peter. A magnificent brute with a tender regard for my feelings."

Miss Magnon took a quick step forward. "A portrait on the wall, a coachman in the hall . . . cold, cold is the coachman's bed, for never the twain shall wed." That sounds like something out of the Victorian Age, doesn't it, Peter? Doggerel to modern ears, and well—it probably even sounded that way a century ago to poets who could do better.

"I don't remember where I read it. It's just a foolish little rhyme and you mustn't let it trouble you. I only quoted it because there isn't so much difference between a coachman and a gardener, Peter. Don't you see? You may be my gardener, but that doesn't mean you have to endure agonies of frustration. We are living in 1963, Peter. We must be bold and forceful and direct and not let silly inhibitions stand in our way. There is nothing quite as precious as human happiness. Forty years of aging may have changed me a little. But we all must age, Peter, and the girl on the wall is still me. Close your eyes, and travel back through time. The vision Freudian permits you to do that."

"Ma'am, I—"

Miss Magnon took another quick step forward. "Close your eyes and think of me as I was,

Peter. Your bride and your life. You are as cruel as Death, Peter—a truly masterful man. My lover Death . . . my lover Peter. What more could a woman desire. With the first bright gush of blood we shall be wed! Now,

and for long as forever is." From under her dress Miss Magnon whipped out the razor-sharp gardener's tool she had secreted between her withered breasts and slit Peter's throat from ear to ear.



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A FRAME HAS FOUR SIDES

by

MICHAEL
AVALLONE

TRAGEDY OVERTAKES A TIMES SQUARE PATSY

DOUGLAS CARSON is the name. You've seen me in the movies—strictly low budget pictures of course. They had me typed for just one kind of part. I played mugs all the time. Bouncers, bodyguards, plug uglies. Once I was the tough owner of a lunch room. That's it, see? *Tough.*

Above the chin didn't count. I never had any brains, and that's why I'm not in the movies any more and standing on Times Square in the pouring rain won-

dering what I'd better do next.

The first thing I remember about that day was drifting up to the newsstand right back of the Times Building. New York had been a complete dud about jobs for ex-Hollywood actors with a rep for getting drunk. Even TV had kissed me off, and I hadn't much reason to think out-of-town would be better.

But it was worth a try. Pittsburgh, maybe! Or even St. Louis. I thought that just buying a news-

paper might steer me straight and that's how I happened to collide head on with a guy I hadn't planned on meeting and didn't know at all. He just bumped into me without saying a word and grabbed hold of my arm like he'd been thinking of having a confidential chat with me for a long time.

"Hey!" I roared. "Watch what you're doing, can't you?"

He just smiled. "Want to make a couple of thousand bucks?" he said.

I looked him up and down. I could see he was well-dressed, tall, and kind of serious looking, and tabbed him as a serious business guy in spite of a mustache that was pencil-thin and didn't go with his rugged build or the steely glint in his eyes.

"Who do I have to kill or are you just talking about a place where the little kiddies roll around in the dirt?" I asked.

"I mean folding money and you do have to kill someone" he said.

I was startled. After all, I'd been kidding. But I managed to say, "Yeah? Who?"

"My wife." Anyone watching us would have sworn he was talking about the weather.

It should have been a gag. But being broke and my stomach flapping like clothes on a housewife's line, I didn't feel like laughing.

"What's the pitch, friend? Do you know me, by any chance?"

He gave me a cigarette from a fancy-looking cigarette case and smiled again as he held out a lighter.

"Yes Douglas Carson, I know you. I heard you were at liberty, and I need a man who has a reputation for handling himself with competence in any kind of situation. You fill the bill on all counts. I've watched you act, you see."

His cock-sure attitude was beginning to rub me the wrong way. "Just who are you?" I asked.

My tone didn't bother his smile worth a damn. "Dexter Daneille mean anything to you, Carson?"

It certainly did. I've always had a lot of admiration for Fort Knox. I must have gaped at him.

"You mean you're the gent who married the second richest dame in the country? Barbara—something or other."

"Barbara Freeman Daneville, to be precise." Suddenly, he wasn't smiling any more. "How about my offer?"

It was still raining. I was still broke. Hell, maybe I could get a meal or a sawbuck out of it. Anyway you look at it, I didn't have much choice. Wouldn't you go into the first hallway you saw to get out of a torrential downpour, without bothering to take a second look?

He took me uptown. Somewhere in the Seventies on Fifth Avenue. We didn't take a cab either. We rode in his car, a sleek

foreign job half a block long. It was still pouring when we got there.

Maybe, that's why I can't place the exact street. It was misty, with a heavy fog rolling in across the park and I was too interested in enjoying my smoke in the dry, warm interior of the car.

His apartment was distinctly on the elegant side. Everything from Etruscan vases to arty statues that must have set him back a pile of dough.

Don't ask me how I was able to recognize Etruscan vases. It was just something that had stuck in my thick noggin from some movie I'd been in a couple of summers before.

We went into his book-lined study and he poured me a drink. He had a pretty stiff one himself. I was watching him closely now, trying to fill in what I remembered hearing about him. A college guy with a glib line who had come along during an open hunting season and roped this Barbara Freeman dame in with no trouble at all.

It all came back with a rush. She was as homely as hell. He was what would pass as a Dream Man for any Plain Jane. It must have been duck soup for him at that.

"Well, Carson," Daneville said, setting his drink down. "Explanations are in order. My wife is at her family's estate in Larchmont, and will be getting back about twelve. Midnight is her usual

hour, at any rate. Make it look good. I want it to seem like the work of a burglar caught in the act of stealing valuable property. I'll show you a wall safe upstairs —there'll be two thousand dollars in it—the exact amount of your fee.

"Her room is next to mine. I'll show you that too. There's some jewelry in her bureau drawer. Not her best stuff, but you should be able to raise something on it." He stared at me hard. "How you finish her off is your business." Suddenly, his eyes were looking down at my big, thick mitts.

I can't begin to tell you how smoothly and professionally he ran through that spiel. I can describe it best by saying he sounded like a doctor advising a serious-minded patient how to cure himself of warts. I guess I didn't look serious-minded enough, because he suddenly got mad.

"What's the matter, Carson? Not changing your mind are you?"

"No," I stalled. "I was just thinking. Where are you going to be all this time?"

He smiled in obvious relief. "I'll be playing cards with some business associates at my club. The game should run well past twelve. My wife generally complains about how late I get in." He made that sound like the reason he was hiring someone to do her in.

"Suppose your wife doesn't

come home at all tonight?" I said. "Maybe she stays over at a friend's, maybe her train is late—"

I helped myself to more of the liquor. I was going to get some good out of this before I laughed in his face, and took off.

"If she doesn't come by two o'clock, you can check out," he said. "Tomorrow we can try again. I know where you are staying, and I'll get in touch with you. No, wait! If she doesn't show up I'll meet you in front of the newsstand at three tomorrow afternoon. Is that clear?"

I was getting a few ideas of my own. If my luck held I would be making a couple of grand the easy way.

"It's a deal," I said. "Murder isn't exactly my line. But it's been a long, hard year."

"Good." He got up. "Come on. I'll show you the set-up."

The set-up was something I never got to see. Not in advance, anyway. One minute, he was leading me upstairs. The next—someone was throwing water in my face, hollering about a dead woman in the other room and tugging a gun out of my hand that had one of my big fingers curled around the trigger.

How could I hope to make the cops believe me when I started shouting that I'd been drugged

and sucked into the phoniest frame of all time? I'll hand him this much. He'd played it cool all the way. All the time he'd spent yammering his proposition at me she had been lying in her bedroom staining the fancy Turkish rug with the reddest blood I've ever seen.

One thing more. He *wasn't* Dexter Daneville. The real Daneville had been at his club playing cards all night long with his business cronies.

You see, the real Daneville had hired another down-and-outer, an ex-actor at that, to impersonate him and set me up for the frame. Cute huh?

When the phony dropped out of sight, I didn't have a leg to stand on. But when the case comes up for trial, I'll fix him good.

What that guy doesn't realize is that I'm a dead leftie, a southpaw if there ever was one. It's on my record all the way back to kindergarten.

If I'd shot Barbara Freeman Daneville I certainly wouldn't have used my right hand would I? And—my Draft Board will back me up on this one—the index finger of my right hand is permanently *stiff*.

Hell, it was stiff enough ten years ago to get me rejected when my draft number came up.

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the BODY that CAME BACK



PART TWO OF THREE GENEROUS INSTALLMENTS

WHAT WENT BEFORE . . .

Carla Andrews, a Hollywood script writer, has flown to Miami to attend her daughter's wedding to State Senator-Elect, William Greer. The daughter, Vicki, does not know that her father is an ex-convict whom her mother married before changing her name and achieving success in the film colony. Carla has heard rumors that her husband has been killed in an armed robbery, but he turns up unexpectedly at the *Encanto Hotel* in Miami, and demands money. There is a struggle and she accidentally shoots him. She is terrified, and doesn't know what to do.

While in Hollywood she had collaborated with Brett Halliday on some Mike Shayne television scripts, and suddenly she remembers that in the Shayne novels the redhead has been known to step a little outside the Law at times to see that justice is done. She sits down and writes out a confession which reads like the hysterical self-accusation of a frightened girl and signs it with her daughter's name. Carla's purpose is to convince Shayne, when she has enlisted his aid, that her ex-convict husband, Al Donlin, found her daughter alone in the hotel suite awaiting her mother's arrival, threatened the girl with bodily harm and forced her to kill him in self-defense, without suspecting that the man was her own father.

She makes sure that Shayne will believe her story by placing a newspaper cutting announcing her daughter's en-

gagement in the slain man's jacket pocket. Then Carla telephones Shayne, tells him that they have a mutual friend, Brett Halliday, and appeals to him for help. When Shayne arrives at the *Encanto* she shows him the forged confession and tells him that her daughter's entire future happiness is at stake. Should a young girl who has killed in self-defense have to live for the rest of her life with the terrible knowledge that she has slain her own father?

Shayne is moved by her story, realizing how ugly a police investigation would be, and how disastrously it would affect Vicki's coming marriage. When Carla pleads with him to remove the body from the hotel suite, so that it will be found by the police a considerable distance from the *Encanto*, he agrees that the plan has merit.

Shayne is driving through Miami with Donlin's body in the trunk compartment of the car which the slain man had left in front of the hotel, a late model Ford, when an accidental collision with the drunken driver of another car results in a charge of reckless driving and an attempt to bribe a police officer. He is taken to police headquarters and booked on both charges. Donlin's body is still in the trunk compartment of the Ford and when the police discover that Donlin had been driving a stolen car, belonging to a certain Mr. Duclos, Shayne, in desperation, asks a young reporter to get in touch immediately with the redhead's old friend Tim Rourke, of the *Miami Daily News*.

© 1963, by Brett Halliday

THE NEW MIKE SHAYNE BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Shayne had good reason to worry about the body he'd left locked in the trunk compartment of a stolen car. What was worse . . . the odds against him kept rising like a kite in a hurricane!

WHEN THE DOOR OPENED AGAIN three men walked into the room. In the lead was Detective-Sergeant Loomis whom Mike Shayne knew casually. He was a stern-faced, middle-aged man in plain clothes, completely bald, with shrewd blue eyes and a reputation for stubborn honesty.

Ernie Hale, one of the officers who had arrested Shayne, was behind him, looking a trifle subdued now, and not nearly so pleased or sure of himself. Behind the two policemen was a squat, swarthy man with a bristling black mustache. He looked nervous and uneasy, as though he would have very much preferred to be home in bed instead of here at police headquarters.

The sergeant nodded to Shayne without speaking, and turned his



head to tell Ernie mildly, "You can unlock the cuffs now. I don't think Shayne is going to make a break for it."

"Like I said, I wasn't takin' no chances, Sarge." Ernie avoided

Shayne's eyes while he unlocked the handcuffs. "All these years I been hearin' stories how tough this guy is."

"All right." The sergeant dismissed Ernie with a jerk of his head toward the door. "You and Barkus get back on patrol."

When the door closed behind the traffic policeman, Loomis asked the swarthy man, "Have you ever seen this man before, Mr. Duclos?"

"Never in my life. All I know is them cops say he stole my car. Standing right out in front of my house. By golly, it's a pretty pass when detectives start stealing cars right on the city streets."

"A private detective, Mr. Duclos. All right. We've got your statement and you've got your car. No real harm done. We'll call on you if anything else comes up. You may as well go home now."

"What I want to know is . . . does he get away with it? Stealing my car! If that's not a crime . . ."

"We'll take care of that." Sergeant Loomis turned him firmly toward the door and patted him on the shoulder. Then he turned back to the redhead and studied him a moment, the very faintest suggestion of a smile quirking one corner of his mouth.

"What in hell is this all about, Shamus?" he asked.

"Naturally, I didn't know the damned car was stolen," Shayne told him fervently. He spread out

his hands. "I just got conned, that's all. I was driving up Third Street about twelve o'clock when my car sputtered and quit on me. I was late for an appointment as it was . . ." He looked at his watch ruefully. "And I'm a hell of a lot later right now. So I went into a bar there . . . East of Miami Avenue. I was going to call a cab, but a guy was sitting there at the end of the bar and he called me by name. He was pretty tight and weaving on the stool. 'Hey, Mike. Howsa boy?' or something like that. I know him, Sarge. Damn it. I know I've run into him somewhere. Some kind of cheap chise-ler, but I'll be damned if I can place his name."

Shayne screwed up his face in intense concentration, then shook his head dismally. "I've been trying to remember it ever since I found out it was a stolen car. Right then it didn't seem to matter. I just told him my car had conked out and I had to call a taxi and he pulled out some car keys and said why didn't I borrow his Ford parked right outside.

"Who in hell would have thought the guy was offering me a hot car like that? Maybe he was just drunk enough to think it was funny. How the hell do I know what he thought? I was in a hurry and I just wasn't looking any gift horse in the mouth. So I grabbed the keys and went on, thinking I'd remember his name in the morn-

ing and get it back to him. I'll certainly tell you his name when I do remember it."

"You do that," said Loomis drily. "You don't expect me to believe that story, do you?"

"Would you rather believe I deliberately stole a car parked in front of somebody's house?" demanded Shayne hotly.

"No. I don't believe that either. All right. So you had a crack-up and cold-cocked the man who drove into you?"

"He asked for it," Shayne defended himself. "If he's got the guts to come in and make a charge against me I'll make him wish he hadn't."

"It appears that Mr. Seymour had second thoughts about that. He hasn't showed up yet. So that leaves a little matter of attempted bribery, Shayne."

"That was stupid," Shayne told him flatly. "Even if I didn't intend it as a bribe, I should have realized it could be so misconstrued, but all I wanted was for that cop to put it up as a bond for my appearance tomorrow morning. I was worried about being late for my appointment, and those two goons were enjoying pushing me around. I should have known better, but I just wasn't thinking straight."

"Is this your money?" The sergeant put his hand in his pocket and drew out some folded bills.

Shayne took them and counted



five twenties. He started to protest that there had been ten twenties originally, but he checked himself. This was no time to stir up a fuss about a hundred bucks.

He said, "I haven't got the serial numbers, of course. But they were twenties that I gave that cop named Barkus. Look here, Sergeant," he hurried on persuasively. "Let me call Chief Gentry at home. You tell him what the situation is. I've still got to keep that damned appointment somehow."

Loomis shook his head. "Why no. I wouldn't want to bother the chief this time of night. I know perfectly well what he'd say. So, beat it, Shayne. We know where to reach you. I hope she hasn't got tired of waiting."

Shayne grinned tiredly and appreciatively. "So do I. Thanks, Sergeant."

He went out the door fast and was intercepted down the hall by

a reporter from the *Herald* and Timothy Rourke of the *News*. The *Herald* man grabbed his arm and said happily, "We've been hearing all sorts of stories, Shayne. What's the lowdown? You got your license jerked?"

Shayne pulled away and growled at him, "Talk to Sergeant Loomis. You got your heap, Tim?"

The saturnine reporter nodded with a grin. "Just so you won't be forced to steal any more transportation tonight. Down this way, Mike."

He turned into a corridor that right-angled away from the other, and a moment later they walked out into the night and he indicated his car between two *No-Parking* signs. Shayne got in and Rourke went around to get under the wheel. He settled himself and muttered wonderingly, "What in the living hell has been going on tonight, Mike? There were all kinds of rumors floating around the station, but I didn't get anyone of them straight. You kill somebody . . . or what?"

Shayne sighed and said, "Mostly 'what,' Tim." He got out a cigarette and lit it, realizing, suddenly, that it felt good not to have handcuffs on his wrists.

Then he said, "It's a long story, and we need liquor to wash it down with. Can't we get the hell away from here? I've seen enough cops for one night."

"Sure, Mike," Tim told him

soothingly. He started the motor and pulled away from the curb. "Home, James?" he asked cheerfully.

"Wait a minute. No. Drop me at the Encanto Hotel, Tim. And then forget you did."

"You're not running out on me, Mike. Not without telling me what this is all about."

"No. I've got to pick my car up at the Encanto. About forgetting it —I just meant if anything comes up later. Look. I'm confused, Tim. I've got thinking to do. Save your questions, huh?"

"Sure," said Timothy Rourke easily. "Will you be at the Encanto long?"

"Just long enough to get my car. Then I'll meet you back at my place."

The two men had been close friends for a great many years, and Timothy Rourke knew when it was not the time to ask questions.

He drove to the Encanto without speaking again, pulled up under the canopy, and said, "I'll be waiting for you, Mike."

"Sure. You've got a key. Use it." Shayne got out and fumbled in his pocket for his parking stub to give to the doorman, and the reporter pulled away into the night.

IX

WHILE SHAYNE waited at the hotel entrance for his car to be brought around, he glanced inside

and saw two house phones just inside the door. He hesitated, scowling uncertainly. Should he call Carla Andrews and warn her what had happened? He wondered whether Vicky had checked back with her mother, and whether she had returned safely to the hotel.

He stepped inside quickly and lifted one of the phones, but replaced it before giving the room number. Why worry Carla at this point? What the hell could he tell her? Simply that he had bungled the job and that her dead husband might turn up anywhere, at any time.

There would still be the matter of identifying the man, he realized. There was nothing about him at this point to connect him with Carla. Just the blanket that had the name of the hotel on it. But there was nothing to show what room it came from. No, he told himself. Carla and Vicky were safe enough at this point if they just kept quiet and went on as though nothing had happened. And Carla was too intelligent a woman not to realize that.

If the body were discovered in the trunk of the Ford a certain private detective named Michael Shayne was the only person who could be tied directly to it. Finding the blanket, the police would check the Encanto Hotel, of course, looking for a missing guest who answered the dead man's description. They wouldn't find one. It would take days to check every

room in the hotel for a missing blanket.

There was no reason to worry about Carla and Vicky at this point. He was the only one who had things to worry about. He strolled back outside as his car was driven up by an attendant, gave the lad a half-dollar and slid in behind the wheel.

He turned south on Biscayne Boulevard, drove to Southeast First Street and then west. He found Rourke's car parked at the curb beside his hotel on the north bank of the Miami River, and he pulled up close behind it and shut off the lights and ignition. He hadn't formulated any definite plans for the remaining hours of the night, but he was positive that he wouldn't be going to bed and let matters take their natural course.

He went in a side door with a stairway leading up that bypassed the lobby, climbed to the second floor and went down the hall to his door which was standing ajar and showing a light inside.

Timothy Rourke was comfortably relaxed in a deep chair with a bourbon highball in his hand. He had set out a cognac bottle for his host, with an empty four-ounce glass beside it, and a tall glass of ice water for a chaser. His deep-set eyes were hooded, and they glittered with happy curiosity as the redhead strode into the room. He lifted his glass in wordless greeting and sipped from it as

Shayne crossed to the table and poured himself a healthy drink.

Still standing, Shayne drank it in three swallows, automatically chased it down with a sip of ice water and said feelingly, "By God, I needed that." He poured more liquor into the glass and then sat down and lit a cigarette.

"Just about two hours ago," Rourke reminded him, "you tore yourself away from my scintillating company and refused another drink . . . which I offered to buy, by God, and swore you were coming straight home and to bed and ten hours sleep. What the devil have you been up to in those two hours?"

"What did you pick up at headquarters?"

"Not a whole lot. Just that you'd been arrested driving a stolen car and tried to bribe the two cops to let you go. And that you deliberately ran over some honest citizen who tried to stop you. Nothing really world-shaking for Mike Shayne spending a quiet evening in bed."

Shayne grinned mirthlessly and clawed fingers through his hair. "Things do have a way of happening. Tonight it was a friend of Brett Halliday's in town from Hollywood."

"Good looking?" asked Rourke alertly.

"You know Brett." Shayne made a gesture. "She had a run-in with a dead man, so who the hell

should she call on but Brett's old friend Mike Shayne?"

"It figures. Where else would tomorrow's headlines come from?"

"This is going to be one hell of a headline," growled Shayne. "If things don't break right." He took another drink and then got up from his chair and began to prowl up and down the room.

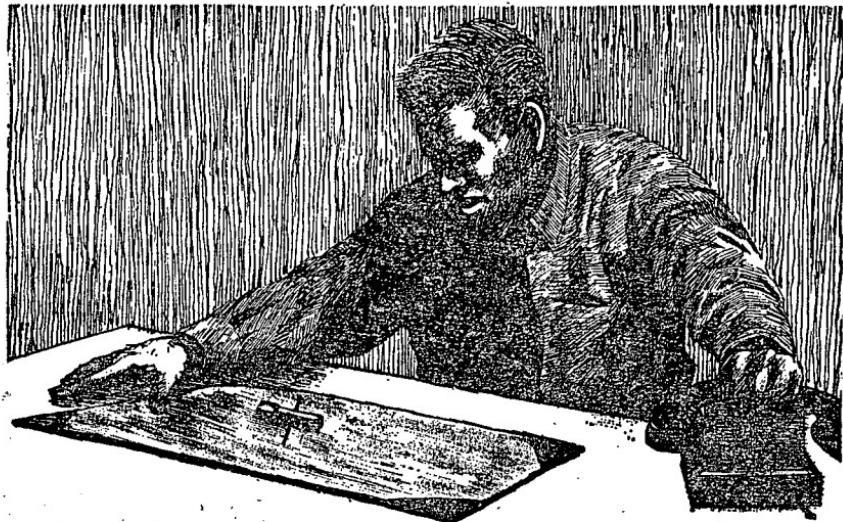
Rourke watched his friend for a moment, then asked, "Are you going to tell me about it?"

"I'm trying to decide how much to tell you," Shayne confessed angrily. "It's going to sound like hell when I put it into plain words. You're going to sit back in judgment and ask why in hell I let myself get pulled into it. All I had to do was say *no*, God damn it. All I had to do was turn my back and walk out of the hotel room. Which is what any sensible human being would have done," he added in a tone of deep disgust.

"But she was a friend of Brett's," Rourke reminded him.

"Yeh. God protect us from the friends of our friends. All right, Tim. Right now I'm not going to try and explain *why* I'm in this up to my neck. Take my word for it that it seemed like the least I could do at the time. If we get in a real jam and you're questioned, the less you know the better it'll be all round?"

"What kind of jam are we headed for?" Rourke asked him calmly but with lively curiosity.



"We've got to steal a car for one thing."

"My God! Haven't you stolen enough cars for one night?"

"The same car," Shayne said. "Did you talk to that man, Duclos, at headquarters?"

"Owner of the stolen Ford? Yeh. I got the dope from him on his car."

"Address and all?"

"Sure. I've got my notes right here. But he'll be careful after it was stolen once. He won't leave it parked in front of his house with the keys in it again. What the hell's so important about that car, Mike?"

"It's something I left in it," Shayne hedged. "We've got to get it back before morning."

Timothy Rourke stiffened in his

chair and put a thin hand up over his eyes. "Oh, no," he groaned sepulchrally. "Don't tell me that. Not a dead man, Mike. You didn't go off and leave a corpse in that stolen car. Locked in the trunk, huh?"

"Whatever would give you an idea like that?" demanded Shayne, looking at his old friend incredulously and laughing, although not very heartily.

"Because I know you, damn it. Because I can put two and two together and it always comes out four where Mike Shayne is concerned. There's this dame who blows into town and has a run-in with a dead man. There's you who could have said no and turned your back and walked out of her bedroom . . . but didn't. That's two

and two . . . see? And it adds up to a corpse floating around town in a stolen car. Right?"

"You have the damnedest imagination," Shayne chuckled. "I wouldn't tell you if you were right, Tim. What you don't know, you may not have to perjure yourself about later. Let's just leave it that we've got to steal that Ford back tonight and get something out of it that I mislaid."

"We got to do that?" asked Rourke gently.

"We," said Shayne firmly. "It's a two-man caper, Tim. You're elected."

"Do you know what the penalty is for moving corpses around?"

"No one has said it is a corpse," Shayne reminded him. "Even so . . . do you remember ever asking me that same question before?"

"No I don't. And if you think for a minute—"

"A couple of times, Tim." Shayne moved around in front of him and grinned happily. "Actually, we never did find out the answer because we never got caught at it."

"That was years ago," Rourke protested feebly. "We were crazy in those days. Now, God damn it, we're grown up."

Shayne laughed at him. "Maybe you are. I thought I was . . . until tonight." He paused, looking away from Timothy Rourke. He was using the same arguments that Carla Andrews had used with him.

Well, why not? He had been persuaded by them.

He turned back and said slowly, "You've got to help me, Tim. I'm really in a spot this time."

"I don't see why," muttered Rourke. "Hell, it may be days before that guy Duclos has any reason to open up his trunk. He probably drives it to work . . . parks it in a lot somewhere. What's the reason for going off half-cocked tonight. There will probably be plenty of chances the next day or so to get the car unobtrusively and remove . . . well, whatever it is you left behind."

Shayne said angrily, "What if he has a flat on his way to work tomorrow morning? How do we know his wife doesn't drive him to work and bring the car home for the day? Can't you see her driving into a supermarket tomorrow and buying three or four sacks of groceries . . . having a boy take them out to the car for her, and her saying, 'just a minute while I open up the trunk and you can put them in there.' Where would I be then?"

"Well, where would you be?" asked Rourke weakly. "How could anybody prove the body was yours?"

Shayne stopped pretending it wasn't a body he was talking about. He said savagely, "How much proof would the cops need? Right now they know I had possession of the car tonight. So far as can be proven, I'm the only one

who *has* had possession of it since it was stolen from in front of Ducclos' house. Me—Mike Shayne. The conniving private dick who has a reputation for putting it over on the police. So they find a corpse securely locked in the trunk.

"Oh, sure. I agree with you, Tim. That's not *proof* of anything. But it's pretty damn good *prima facie* evidence that your best friend knows more about the corpse than is good for him to know."

"But you are in the clear on it, aren't you, Mike? The guy was dead when you came into the case . . . the way I put together the bits and pieces you've been tossing me. There'd be no real rap facing you even if they did prove you put the body there."

Shayne turned away from the reporter, took two short steps to the table and poured himself a drink. "You're right, Tim," he agreed in a conversational tone. "I'd probably be able to talk myself out of a real rap if I came clean and told them exactly how it happened.

"I'd be sure to get my license suspended . . . probably lose it . . . but, what the hell? I'm not broke. In fact, I've been promising Lucy I'd take a long vacation. Maybe this is a good time to do it."

He held his drink up to the light and stared at it for a moment with a frown. "The only thing is, Tim. In order to clear myself I'd have to tell everything I know

about that dead man. And that would ruin a couple of innocent lives. Is that what you want? Or are you going to get off your fanny and go out and help me steal that Ford back tonight?" He tipped the glass to his mouth and drank deeply.

Timothy Rourke said, "You knew the answer to that before you asked it."

Shayne said absently, "Of course I did. All we got to do now is figure how to pull it off." He looked at his watch. "Ten minutes after one. Let's get the local portion of the final newscast and see if there's any change in the picture." He stepped to one side and turned the switch on a portable radio.

In a moment they heard a glib voice saying, "And now for our final story of the evening . . . to let all of you go to bed with a chuckle.

"There was an old saying long ago—if a man bites a dog, *that's* news. It may have become somewhat trite these days, but there are variations on the theme which still ring the bell.

"How about this one for instance: Detective found in possession of stolen automobile assaults citizen who seeks to halt his getaway and attempts to bribe incorruptible police officers who apprehend him in the act?

"Yes sir. That's the story that comes out of Miami tonight. Mi-

chael Shayne is the detective involved in tonight's comedy of errors . . . or, were they errors?

"Mike Shayne in person. The redhead, two-fisted, hard-drinking private eye, glorified in numerous mystery novels and on television was accused of just that tonight.

"Involved in a minor traffic accident in downtown Miami while driving a stolen Ford sedan belonging to George Duclos of this city, the supposedly level-headed crime discourager of the television screen went berserk and brutally assaulted the driver of the other car whose identity remains unknown in a frantic effort to escape before officers of the law reached the scene.

"Foiled in this attempt by Officers Ernie Hale and Eugene Barkus, veteran members of Miami's traffic detail, this man who is licensed by the State of Florida as a private investigator and who is sworn to uphold the law, offered a cash bribe to the officers which was promptly and properly refused on the spot, and the redhead, fiery-tempered Mr. Shayne was hauled into police headquarters with handcuffs on his wrists like any ordinary felon to face the variety of charges placed against him.

"Due to his influence with some of the higher-ranking members of the Miami Police Department, it is the understanding of this reporter that Shayne was later released

on his own recognizance . . . with a slap on the wrist as it were, and an admonition to go and sin no more.

"It is a moot question whether this is the end of the affair. Perhaps there are two different sets of rules in the city of Miami governing the actions of ordinary private citizens and of extraordinary private detectives. We will demand and expect a statement from Chief of Police Will Gentry early tomorrow morning concerning the disposition of this case.

"And, now this is your roving reporter, Earl Hodges, signing off . . ."

X

MICHAEL SHAYNE flipped off the radio and turned to Rourke who was leaning back comfortably with a satanic look of glee on his emaciated face.

"There's your headline for tomorrow. A real good juicy one." Rourke smacked his lips approvingly. "We'll have to work up some sort of story to counteract it in the *News*."

Shayne sat down glumly and sipped his drink. "Right now we've got more important things to think about than unfavorable publicity. What's that guy's address, Tim?"

"Duclos?" The reporter took a notebook from his pocket and opened it. "Out in the Little River section. George Duclos. In the two

hundred block on Northwest Seventy-seventh Street."

Shayne said, "Finish your drink and let's go out to have a look-see."

Rourke sighed and said, "I'm beginning to think you're serious. Look. If we get caught at it this time—"

Shayne said, "We won't get caught, Tim. We'll just case the joint and see what the situation is. It shouldn't be too difficult. All we need is a few minutes alone with that Ford." He drained his glass and stood up decisively.

Rourke groaned audibly and followed him with feigned reluctance. They went down the hallway to the stairs, down those and out the side door into the night. Shayne strode directly to the reporter's car parked in front of his and opened the door on the right side.

"Better use your transportation," he suggested casually. "Too many cops know my car and they might start wondering if they saw me prowling around that neighborhood tonight."

Rourke went around and got in beside him. "Sure. Let's take my car . . . and stick out *my* neck."

Shayne grinned and lit a cigarette as he started up and made a U-Turn in the middle of the block. "There's no law against you driving me around town. We won't take any chances, Tim."

"Ha-ha," Rourke laughed hol-



lowly. "Old cautious Mike Shayne. Sure. I know." He turned east to the Boulevard and headed north. "You going to tell me any more about how you got yourself dragged into this mess?"

"I've already told you," Shayne reminded him mildly. "This friend of Brett's called me up—"

"From the Encanto Hotel?" demanded Rourke, hunched over the wheel and driving a moderate forty miles per hour over the almost empty boulevard.

"To the Encanto," agreed Shayne. "If you must know. She had a suite there with a corpse in her bedroom. Damn it, Tim. She hadn't killed the guy. Her daughter had . . . just before she checked in from Hollywood. A sweet kid who's scheduled to get married tomorrow. She panicked and left a note for mama and ran out."

"How do you know all this?"

asked Rourke cautiously. "There's a good-looking dame who tells you a plausible story—"

"I read the note her daughter left her. I've got it in my pocket," Shayne told him angrily. "Damn it, don't work so hard being cynical, Tim. This is on the up-and-up. The girl shot him in self-defense when he came to the hotel room looking for her mother . . . and then attacked her. No jury in the world would ever hold her for that."

"Then why get yourself involved? If it's open and shut like you say!"

"Because the guy she shot to death was her own father . . . only she didn't know it. You see, the guy deserted her mother before she was born, and she never saw him. Now do you get the picture? Are you going to contend that she should be told the truth . . . on the eve of her wedding? Would you want to give her something like that to live with the rest of her life?"

"Won't she find out anyhow?"

"Not if we're lucky and can get hold of that damned corpse and dispose of it somewhere a long way from the Encanto. It's a long story, Tim, but take my word for it. The odds are fifty-to-one she'll never know it was her father this way. If I'd left the body lying there and called the cops as I should have, there would have been different headlines in tomorrow's paper. You would have done the same

damned thing I did under the same circumstances."

"Maybe," muttered Timothy Rourke. "Fifteen years ago . . . sure. But we're growing up, Mike."

"Speak for yourself," Shayne told him blithely. He stretched out his long legs and took a deep drag on his cigarette, and then chuckled happily. "Personally, I haven't had so much fun in years. When those cops told me I was driving a stolen car, and with a stiff locked up in the trunk there at headquarters—"

He threw back his head and laughed heartily at the recollection. "That stupid Georgia Cracker putting the handcuffs on me! If he'd just gone around and unlocked the trunk."

"I'll bet you weren't laughing then," Rourke said sourly. They were approaching the intersection at 79th, and he slowed and pulled into the left lane to make the turn.

"No," agreed Shayne. "But it is funny now . . . looking back on it."

Rourke turned on 79th and drove slowly through the Little River business section to Miami Avenue where he turned south two blocks and then onto 77th Street. Leaving the avenue behind them, they entered a residential section of modest homes where practically all the houses were dark at this time of night.

In the 200 block, only one house was lighted on either side of the tree-lined street. Rourke slowed to

a crawl as he approached it, checking the numbers. He muttered. "That's the Duclos house with the lights on. They must be celebrating getting their car back."

He continued past without actually stopping, and Shayne, looking out the window on his side, saw there was no Ford parked in front or in the driveway, and the one-car attached garage stood open and empty.

"It's not there, damn it. Pull in to the curb here at the corner and shut off your lights. Where the hell do you suppose Duclos is? He was supposed to have left the station before I did."

"Maybe he had a flat tire driving home," suggested Rourke caustically. "Maybe every police car in town is looking for Mike Shayne right now."

"Maybe. But let's wait here a little and see what happens. If he drives up pretty soon, we can go back to the Avenue for a drink and wait for him to get settled for the night. It's pretty dark back there in the middle of the block, and the driveway and garage are well shaded."

Rourke sighed and slumped morosely behind the wheel. "It's your job, Mike. I just drove you out here."

They both smoked two cigarettes while they sat in silence and waited, and not a single car came down the residential street. Behind them, the front windows of the

one-story Duclos house continued to show bright light, but there was nothing to indicate what was going on inside.

When Shayne spun the butt of his second cigarette away, he said impatiently, "This isn't getting us anywhere. We might sit here all night."

Rourke pulled himself erect behind the wheel and reached for the ignition key. "My sentiments exactly. Let's get the hell out of here."

"And drive around the block and come back and stop right in front," Shayne told him calmly. "You go in and find out what's what with that Ford."

"Me?"

"You're a reporter," Shayne reminded him. "You've come out to get an interview with Duclos about how his car was stolen and got recovered so quickly. Nothing queer about that. Ask his wife where he is and when she expects him."

"Suppose he's there?" Rourke was slowly driving around the block as Shayne directed. "He might have left the car some place . . . loaned it to a friend or some damn thing."

"Then find out where it is," said Shayne. "Tell him you want to examine it for fingerprints to disprove my story that someone else stole it and loaned it to me. He'll go for that. He was sore at the police station because they didn't have me locked up in a cell."

Rourke sighed and turned back into the block where the single lighted house stood out like a beacon in the night. He said wonderingly, "I get sucked into doing the damnedest things."

"All in a good cause," Shayne told him heartily. "I'll slouch down out of sight if a car pulls up."

Rourke stopped directly in front of the lighted house and shut off his ignition and lights. He got out and went up the walk to the front door with a porch light on, and Shayne watched from the front seat of the car while he rang the bell and waited for at least a full minute before the door opened to admit him.

A woman stood inside the door blinking uncertainly at Timothy Rourke. She had a thin face and straggly brown hair streaked with gray, a sharp nose and faded blue eyes. She wore a cotton print dress and a pair of scuffed blue slippers without any stockings.

He said, "Mrs. Duclos," and she nodded slowly, considering him without rancor but without apparent interest.

He stepped forward briskly and she moved aside to let him enter a small, steamy and cluttered sitting room, with shabby furniture and a general run-down appearance.

"I'm a reporter from the *Miami News*," he said. "I'd like to talk to your husband if he's home."

She said, "He isn't here right



now. But I'm expecting him any minute. I don't know. They called him about his car being stolen. The police did. And he went down to see about it. That was an hour or so ago. Was that what you wanted to talk to him about?"

Passing close in front of her to get inside, Rourke got a strong whiff of gin on her breath, and glancing across the room at a low armchair with a faded slipcover on it and pages of the *News* scattered on the floor around it, he saw a tall glass on a side table with the remnants of a drink in the bottom of it.

He said hastily, "Yes. It's about the stolen car. I'm surprised he isn't home yet. I know he picked his car up at headquarters about an hour ago."

"George'll be along I guess," she said indifferently, closing the door and waving one hand vaguely toward a butt-sprung couch. "If you want to wait he'll be along, I guess. He was that upset about the car when they telephoned him." She moved past him toward the armchair, sliding her feet along on the worn carpet carefully, almost shuffling, and giving the impression that she wasn't entirely too steady on her feet.

"He didn't know it was stolen, you see . . . until they called him. He'd parked it out front and when they asked him over the phone he looked out and then he said, 'Why, by God. It's gone.' You know. You don't expect something like that to happen. Not in a quiet neighborhood like this, you don't. And so they had a police car to stop by to pick him up to go down and identify it, and I don't know why he isn't back home yet. Won't you sit down, Mister? Could I offer you something to drink, maybe?"

She lifted her own glass and drank the dregs, then looked at him over the rim almost coyly. "There's gin in the kitchen . . . and some kind of mixer I guess."

Rourke remained standing. He said, "Nothing for me. Thanks just the same." His gaze wandered around the room, avoiding the somewhat avid look in her pale blue eyes while he mentally cursed himself for allowing Shayne to push him into this sort of situation.

"Not much use my waiting, I guess," he said uncertainly. "If you don't know what's holding him up, you don't know how long he'll be."

He paused abruptly, his roving gaze caught by a 4x6 photograph in a cardboard folder on the mantel of an ornamental—though certainly not usable—fireplace at the end of the room. The woman in the picture was quite clearly Mrs. Duclos, taken ten or fifteen years before, and the features of the man standing beside her brought a strong feeling of recognition to the reporter.

It was not a prepossessing face. Thin and mean looking, with shifty eyes that were too close together, and a tight mouth that smirked rather than smiled.

It was definitely not a picture of her husband, whom Rourke had talked to at police headquarters just a short time before. It was just as definitely the picture of a man whom Rourke knew he should recognize . . . someone whom he had met very recently or whose picture he had seen very recently.

Timothy Rourke had a sixth sense for the memory of faces. Long years of reportorial training had developed that sense to a acute degree, and he often remembered and recognized the picture of someone who had been in the news five or ten years previously.

Now he felt a familiar tingle travelling up his spine as he looked across at the photograph on the

mantel. He should recognize it. He knew he had seen that face recently . . . and under circumstances which he should recall. He didn't know why, but there was that sixth sense working very strongly inside him.

He moved across the room to look at the picture more closely, asking, "Is this your husband, Mrs. Duclos?" knowing, of course, that it wasn't.

"George? No. He's my brother Al."

"Your brother?" Rourke nodded slowly, studying the picture intently. "I can see the family resemblance now, although I must say you're a lot better looking. Does he live in Miami?"

"Al? No. He just lives all over. You know, I don't see him or even hear from him for years until he just suddenly shows up. When he's broke and needs a square meal. Like today."

"He showed up unexpectedly today?" Rourke kept his voice light and casual, still with that tingle working inside him.

"That's right. Like I said, you never know with Al. Never a word for years and then he rolls up like a bad penny. I was afraid George'd be sore but he wasn't. Seemed like he and Al got on real good."

"Is he staying here with you?"

"Where else? We got a spare bedroom."

"I wonder if I could talk to him," said Rourke, "while I'm

waiting for your husband? Just fill me in on background material."

"George and him went down to the corner bar on Miami Avenue for a beer after dinner. George came back about ten and said Al looked like he was headed to make a night of it. I told him he shouldn't give that no-good brother of mine money to spend on beer, but George just laughed and said he'd only give him two bucks and he guessed that wouldn't break us. And anyhow he was with some others that was buying, and he guessed Al'd be back after he spent the two bucks. But he ain't showed up yet, so I guess them others must still be buying."

She lifted her empty glass and peered at it. "Sure you don't want a drink, Mister?"

"No. But why don't you fix yours?" Rourke's thin features were alert with excitement and his deep-set eyes glittered. He was on the verge of remembering, damn it. It was important that he recall where he had seen that face before. All of the ingrained instincts of a news-hound clamored that so vital a matter should not be dismissed with a shrug.

"Don't let me interrupt you," he added politely. "I'll have to be going in a minute anyhow."

"Well!" She studied her glass doubtfully. "I guess I might as well at that." She got to her feet carefully. "Sure you won't have something? Glass of beer, maybe?"

"No, thanks. You go ahead and get one for yourself." Rourke stood with his back to the mantel and watched her navigate a calculated course out of the room and into the kitchen. When she was safely out of sight, he turned and snatched up the cardboard folder, closed it and thrust it down inside the waistband and belt of his trousers, buttoning his unpressed jacket across in front of it.

Then he crossed to the front door where he waited until Mrs. Duclos came back from the kitchen carrying a full glass happily in front of her.

He pulled the door open and apologized, "I've got to run now and keep a date with a deadline at the paper. When Mr. Duclos comes in, ask him to call me at the *Miami News*, huh? Timothy Rourke. Just ask them for Tim Rourke. I'll talk to him on the telephone."

"Well, all right," she agreed uncertainly. "If you're sure you don't want to wait."

He said, "I'm afraid I can't," and went out the door and closed it gently behind him.

Shayne was waiting in the car when he hurried around to the driver's seat and got in. The detective growled, "Took you long enough. Duclos there?"

"No. She hasn't seen him or heard from him since he went down to pick up his car. She expects him home any minute though."



"Did you take time to make seeing her again worth your while?" Shayne asked with obvious irritation. "Or was she the one blonde in fifty you'd just as soon pass up?"

Rourke laughed shortly. "If you could have seen her! Listen, Mike. I'm on to something. I don't know what the hell it is, but it's some-

thing. Listen. There was a picture on the mantel: Mrs. Duclos and a guy she says is her no-good brother. Mike, that guy is in the news. Last few days. Goddamn it! I don't know how or what." In frustration, Tim Rourke beat his doubled fist against the steering wheel.

"But I know it in my bones. That guy is a fugitive. He's wanted. Let's pick him up first, and then find out what it's all about."

"What do you mean? Pick him up?"

"She tells me he showed in Miami today. Broke and hungry. So her husband took him down to a local bistro on the corner of Miami Avenue for a beer after dinner, and he came back about ten but the brother didn't."

Rourke turned on the lights and started his motor and pulled away slowly. "Presumably the brother is still down at the corner bar sopping up free drinks. We stop by and pick him up, Mike, and the chances are you'll get a headline for tomorrow that will put your stolen car caper in the shade."

He went around two corners and headed back for Miami Avenue. Shayne still didn't wholly comprehend what he was talking about. He said, "We pick up this woman's brother? What the hell for?"

"I told you I don't know. But I do know he's wanted by the law . . . and bad. We take him in and we'll find out. Mike Shayne, as us-

ual, is one jump ahead of the police. Nabs desperate fugitive single-handed." Rourke turned the corner on Miami and nodded toward neon lights glowing a block ahead on the right-hand side. "That'll be it."

He found a parking place in front of the tavern and stopped, turned his head to look at Shayne's face. "You don't look real happy," he complained.

Shayne said helplessly, "I just don't get it, Tim. You only saw this guy's picture, but your intuition tells you that he's a wanted man. Ergo: we walk in and arrest him. On what charge?"

"You're a detective," said Rourke cheerfully. "You've got the authority. Look. Have I ever let you down, Mike? Don't you know that I usually know what I'm talking about? No man bats one hundred, of course. But this time I'm sure."

Shayne grinned and said simply, "Okay, Tim, I'll ride with you. What does he look like?"

Rourke unbuttoned his jacket and pulled out the photograph he had stolen from the mantel. He showed it to Shayne. "There he is. I still can't place that mug, but . . . he's wanted, Mike. I'll swear to that."

Shayne took the picture of Mrs. George Duclos and her brother, and studied it carefully in the glaring light of the neon sign.

Then he said grimly, "We're not

going to find him inside that bar, Tim."

"How do you know we're not? She says he and her husband came here after dinner for a beer . . . and as far as she knows he's still here. If he's left, we can maybe show the picture around and find out where he's gone."

Shayne shook his red head firmly and said, "It just happens I know where he is, Tim. Inside the trunk of the Duclos Ford . . . rolled up in a blanket I snatched from the Encanto Hotel."

"For God's sake, Mike! Are you sure about that?" Rourke turned to stare at his companion with glittering eyes in which the excitement of a few minutes ago was intensified.

"I ought to be sure. He and I were pretty intimate there for a few minutes. So he's George Duclos's brother-in-law," Shayne said thoughtfully. "Let's see where the hell that fits in. He was driving George's Ford when he went to the Encanto."

"Is that where you got hold of it?" interrupted Rourke. "You didn't tell me that."

"Yeh. I found the parking stub in his pocket and thought as long as I was moving the body I might as well get his car away at the same time . . . without knowing it was stolen, of course. Which maybe it was or maybe it wasn't," he added.

"You mean maybe Duclos loaned it to him . . . and then later,

when the cops called, he got scared and looked out the window and reported it stolen?"

"It's an old dodge. If so, it must mean that Duclos knew he was hot . . . or at least that he might be headed for some sort of trouble at the Encanto. In that case he must be wondering like hell how I come to turn up driving the car he'd lent his brother-in-law."

"We don't know he did lend it, of course. The way Mrs. Duclos explained it, the two of them came down to the corner bar for a drink after dinner. Her husband came back alone, saying her brother, Al, was sticking around for a time. Could be that Al just waited until George got safely inside the house, then slipped back and copped the car . . . knowing it was sitting outside with the keys in it."

"Sure, it could be either way." Shayne tugged at his left earlobe impatiently. "You called him Al. That's the name of Carla's husband all right. What else did she tell you about him?"

"Carla?" asked Rourke.

"Brett's friend I told you about. The one who phoned me. She claimed she hadn't seen the guy for ten or fifteen years . . . thought he was dead. He'd done time in the pen at least once, and she'd heard he'd been shot in a holdup after he was released."

"Sounds like our Al, all right. Mrs. Duclos said he had a way of popping up unannounced like a



bad penny after she hadn't heard from him in years. I wish to God I could place that face, Mike. I know I've seen a picture of that mug in the last few days, and I also know that he's wanted for some recent crime. Not local, I think. Something must have come over the wires. . . ."

Rourke's voice trailed off. Then he opened the car door decisively. "A couple of drinks may bring it back to me. Why in hell are we sitting out here? I think it's time you told me a little more about how you got acquainted with the guy."

"He was dead when I met him," Shayne got out somewhat reluctantly, though he realized he could also stand a drink at this point.

XI

THEY WENT INSIDE the noisy bar which was still crowded this late on Saturday night and had a juke-box in one corner that added to the drunken din of voices.

They found a vacant booth at the extreme end of the room where they couldn't possibly be overheard, and waited until drinks were put in front of them by a hard-faced, big-breasted waitress who was in a hurry to get back to a conversation she was having at the bar with two men who took turns patting her butt while she leaned between them.

"Al Donlin," Shayne said after he took the first sip of his drink. "That's his name. Ring a bell?"

Rourke shook his head. "Mrs. Duclos didn't mention his last name. No, it doesn't, Mike. Could be he was using an alias . . . if he's got a record."

"Yeh. It could be. Carla Andrews evidently didn't know anything about his being mixed up in something recently and being wanted. Maybe she would have reacted differently if she had known. But I guess not. It wouldn't really have changed anything. He was dead . . . and her daughter had shot her own father." He made a

grimace. "Where do we go from here? Where in *hell* is Duclos?"

"Let's put ourselves in his place. Assume that Al did confide in him that he was in trouble and on the lam and needed money desperately, and was headed for the Encanto Hotel to brace his wife for some. That's what he was after, I suppose?"

"She doesn't know, of course. Remember, she didn't even see him alive. He pushed in on the girl, completely unknown to her, demanded her mother, and said, 'You must be Vicky.' Naturally, she didn't know what it was about. They had a struggle and she grabbed up a pistol that fell out of her suitcase and shot him. He probably did go there for money, though."

"Wait a minute. If he just hit town today, and, as you say, they've been out of touch for years, and she just flew in from Hollywood tonight . . . how in hell did he manage to go straight to her suite at the Encanto? What made him think he'd find her there?"

Shayne gave his glass a twirl. "Carla wondered about that too. But I found a newspaper clipping in his pocket torn out of yesterday's *News*, with a picture of the daughter and a story about her wedding and the statement that her mother was flying in today . . . or yesterday, that is," he added with a look at his watch. "It was a hell of a coincidence, but he must have

figured God was being good to him."

"All right. Back to Duclos. We're assuming that he let Al take his car to go to the Encanto to try and get hold of some dough. An hour or so later, the police call to ask about the Ford registered in his name. He figures there's been trouble, and quickly says his car has been stolen. He still doesn't know what has happened when he gets to the police station and discovers that a private detective has been picked up driving his car. No sign of Al. No word about him at all.

"What in hell can the guy do? He can't ask questions without getting involved. He must be in a hell of a dither right now wondering where the devil Al is . . . what happened at the Encanto . . . and particularly, how-come Mike Shayne ended up driving his Ford. So, what does he do? Go home and to bed?"

"Well, we know he didn't do that." Shayne morosely drained his glass and began making moisture rings with it on the formica table top.

"None of this makes any real difference to my problem," Shayne pointed out impatiently. "That body is still floating around town wrapped up in a blanket from the Encanto Hotel . . . in a car the police know I was driving earlier. I've still got to get my hands on that corpse, Tim."

"I know, Mike." Timothy Rourke lit a cigarette and frowned thoughtfully through the blue smoke across the table at his friend. "If we knew what Al was mixed up in it might help. Maybe he has known associates in Miami. Maybe Duclos knows about them and is trying to contact them . . . hoping to find Al or learn what became of him." He looked down at his empty glass. "Maybe another drink will help."

Shayne shook his head and growled, "We'd better both go slow on the drinks until we find out where we stand. How about you going back to the office and checking crime stories for the last few days? Won't you find it that way?"

"Probably." Rourke pushed the empty glass away reluctantly. "I hate to admit my memory is slipping. I always said I never forgot a face that had news value."

"You're getting older," Shayne chided him. "You pointed that out to me very forcibly tonight. Why not go to the office and give your jaded memory an assist?"

He left two bills on the table and they went out of the noisy tavern into the quiet of the night.

With Rourke behind the wheel, Shayne suggested, "Let's make one last swing back by the Duclos house. Maybe George has finally showed up. We may as well make sure."

But another drive past the house on 77th Street showed it still light-

ed as before and no Ford yet in evidence.

Rourke speeded up after they passed, turned up to 79th and swung back east to the Boulevard.

They drove south in brooding silence for a time, each busy with his own thoughts and secure in the knowledge that communication between the two of them did not require words at this point.

Shayne roused himself from his reverie when Rourke began to slow for the turn off the Boulevard that would take him to the newspaper office.

"Keep on going," he directed. "I think you'd better drop me off, Tim."

"You sure? If I'm lucky it won't take me very long to get all the dope on Al. I know it's right there, Mike."

Shayne said, "I'd better get back to my place. It occurs to me that Duclos may be trying desperately to get hold of me right now . . . and God knows I'd like to have a talk with him."

"That's supposing he knows it was Al who had his car tonight, and he's worried about what happened."

"Yeh. And it also crossed my mind that even if Al didn't confide in his brother-in-law it's possible he has other friends here who knew he was stealing that car to drive to the Encanto. Maybe they were waiting for him to come back with some dough. So they'll be

worried and wondering, and maybe try to reach me."

"How would they know you had anything to do with Al's disappearance?"

"There was that one o'clock newscast," Shayne reminded him. "Private dick caught driving automobile stolen from George Duclos. Anyone who knew Al was supposed to be using that car would start wondering when he heard that."

"I guess so." Rourke continued on south past Flagler Street, and turned off to pull up in front of Shayne's hotel. "Can I get you here as soon as I dig up that information?"

"I'll call you at the office if anything comes up before you call." Shayne got out and went in to the empty lobby of the small hotel while Rourke pulled away behind him.

Pete, the night clerk was on duty. He was a long-time employee of the hotel, a confidant of the detective, and the sharer of many of the redhead's secrets.

He grinned widely from behind the desk as Shayne approached, and assumed a conspiratorial manner. "Hi, Mr. Shayne. After that one o'clock newscast I wondered did they have you under the jail or what. That's what I told the dame when she came looking for you. I says to her, 'Well, it's okay for you to go up and wait for Mr. Shayne in his room because he always told

me I wasn't to say no to any female if she was under seventy and still had her own teeth. 'Make yourself at home,' I told her, 'but I sure can't guarantee when he'll be back.' And she said she'd take a chance on that, and I sent her on up with a boy to unlock your door.'

Shayne leaned on the counter and lifted ragged red eyebrows in astonishment. "Did you say a dame, Pete?"

"Yeh. And she's plenty under seventy and they sure looked like her own teeth. She acted scared stiff and mighty anxious to see you. You in real trouble with the law this time? I've had a feeling you might be."

Shayne said, "No more than usual, Pete. They're yapping at my heels, sort of. I guess I can handle it."

"I bet you can," said Pete worshipfully. "Why'd any cop be dumb enough to think you'd steal a car?"

Shayne grinned and told him cheerfully, "I'll call you for a character witness."

He left the desk and went to the open elevator where a colored boy dozed on the bench inside, tapped him on the shoulder to waken him and was taken up to the second floor.

The door to his apartment was closed, but light from inside showed through the transom.

Shayne unlocked the door and opened it, and said without too

much surprise to the woman who leaped up and stood staring at him, "Hello, Carla. What's wrong?"

XII

CARLA ANDREWS tottered toward Shayne, both hands outstretched, seeming to go all to pieces at the mere sight of him standing there. "Oh my God, Mike!"

Shayne caught her tightly by the elbows and she leaned her weight against him, her face buried against his shoulder, sobbing brokenly.

He held her tightly for a moment, his brooding gaze looking over her head at the two liquor bottles he and Rourke had left sitting on the center table. He wasn't sure, but he had a feeling the level of bourbon was about two inches lower than it had been when they went out.

He turned her away from him after a moment, put an arm about her supple and firm waist, and half-propelled her back to the chair.

"This is no time to go to pieces, Carla. How is Vicky?"

"Oh, Vicky is all right. She's fine." She sank down into the chair and smiled waveringly up at him. "She's sound asleep in bed with a couple of pills . . . convinced that everything is just fine and the sun will shine again tomorrow like always. These kids nowadays. My God," she added wonderingly.

"The way they take things in their stride!"

"She didn't ask too many questions?"

"Hardly any. I didn't really have a chance to tell her the story I'd worked out so carefully. She just wanted to put it away from her . . . out of her mind. She was hysterical at first, but when she calmed down and realized that a miracle had happened—you being the miracle, Mike—and that there wasn't a body lying there in the bedroom . . . well, I think it began to seem like just a bad dream to her. When she wakes up in the morning I have a feeling she won't be sure whether it actually happened or not."

Shayne said strongly, "That's fine. That's wonderful." His hand strayed out to the cognac bottle to pour a drink and he glanced in her direction and saw that her eyes were following his avidly.

"Maybe I better keep you company with a little bit of bourbon."

He said shortly, "Make it a very little bit, Carla. We may not be all the way out of the woods yet."

"You're telling me!" She obediently poured a small drink in the glass Timothy Rourke had left on the table. "What *did* happen, Mike? I'm all confused and scared stiff. I had to come here and talk to you. I didn't know what else to do . . . with Vicky asleep in the other room."

Shayne frowned uncomfortably

at his glass and took a sip from it. "Well, I mislaid the body. That's all. If I can locate that Ford and get it back again before anybody else finds it, we should still be in the clear."

"You . . . *mislaid the body?*" Her voice rose tremulously and she looked utterly aghast. "How could you do that?"

"It took some doing," he admitted with a grimace. "But trust Mike Shayne to work out the small details. I thought you'd have guessed that much," he went on. "If you heard the newscast—"

"What newscast?"

"At one o'clock. I assumed that's what frightened you . . . why you were here."

"I didn't hear any newscast, Mike. I had a telephone call. I didn't know what to say. I didn't know what to think. Some man wanting ten thousand dollars. I tried to stall him the best I could. I didn't know *what* to do. I was feeling so relaxed and wonderful. Vicky was back safely and I'd just gotten her to sleep with a couple of my pills, and I thought the nightmare was over. And then the phone rang. I thought of course it was you calling to say everything was all right, and I grabbed the phone fast before its ringing in the bedroom wakened Vicky. And a strange man answered."

"Exactly what did he say?" Shayne's face and voice were grim.

"I—can't repeat his exact

words," she faltered. "I was so utterly surprised and taken aback . . . and terribly frightened, of course. He asked, 'What have you and that damned private dick done with Al? And then he began abusing me, saying I'd be sorry I called you in on it, and I'd better get some money together quick because he had to have it tonight. Ten thousand dollars, he said, because *he* had what I was after. That Al had given it to him for safe-keeping before he came to see me, and if I didn't dig up ten thousand dollars tonight the deal was all off and I'd never see or hear from it again."

"What is *it?*" Shayne asked blankly.

"That's what I asked him," she cried out wildly. "I told him I didn't know what he was talking about and he just sneered and said he thought I could guess all right.

"And I told him I didn't *have* any sum like ten thousand dollars and he said I'd better dig it up in cash in the next couple of hours. And then he said something like, 'Get your private eye pal to help you raise the money. He's got connections in town. He's into this right up to his neck with you, and he knows what I've got is worth a lot more than that.'

Shayne's face expressed complete puzzlement. "It couldn't have been Duclos," he muttered. "Talking about the body. You're sure he said it was something Al had given

him for safe-keeping before he came to see you?"

"That's what he said. And he seemed positive I knew what he was talking about. Of course, after he hung up I realized he couldn't know that I hadn't even talked to Al. He was assuming that I had and that I knew all about it."

"How did you leave things?" demanded Shayne.

"I told him to give me an hour or so to see if I could raise the money. I told him I'd have to go out, and I gave him this telephone number and your extension and told him to call me here after an hour or so. I didn't know what else to tell him, Mike. I was afraid he'd come there and waken Vicky. Or that the phone might waken her. And I thought maybe you could help me raise the money.

"I've got a little over a thousand in my purse, Mike. I'll give you an IOU for the rest. I can get it Monday with a wire to my bank in L.A." The words tumbled excitedly out of her mouth. "You will help me, won't you? There must be places you can go in Miami even at this time of night and get some cash."

"But what for?" demanded Shayne. "What are we buying for ten grand?"

"I don't know what he's talking about, but the way I see it I'm buying Vicky's peace of mind and her future happiness. Whoever he is and whatever he's got that be-

longed to Al, it's perfectly clear that he knows Al came to see me tonight, and if we don't pay him off everything will have to come out in the papers. And that'll be bad for you, too, Mike. He knows you're in it with me somehow. That's one of the first things he said.

"So it's to your advantage, too, to pay him off and shut him up. But I just want to borrow the money for a couple of days. I can well afford to pay. I don't want you to use your money. You've done enough already."

Shayne moved restlessly in his chair and tugged at his earlobe. "I don't want to see you paying ten thousand bucks for a pig in a poke," he growled. "Let's get this as straight as we can. From what this man said, there was nothing to indicate that he knows Al is already dead?"

"N-no. I don't think so," she faltered. "I don't remember exactly how he said it. He asked what we'd done to Al, I think. Or what we'd done *with* him? I got the impression he didn't know what had happened."

"But he has something that belongs to Al which he's willing to sell to you," pondered Shayne. "That seems to indicate he doesn't expect Al to come around and claim his property."

"You mean . . . he *knows* Al is dead and that's why he feels safe in selling whatever it is to me?"

"It might be the answer. In that

case, if he got the money he'd probably be more than willing to keep his mouth shut about Al going to the Encanto tonight."

"And that's all we want, isn't it?" Her eyes were beginning to shine again and there was a look of fresh hope on her face. "We don't care *what* it is that belonged to Al. We just want him not to tell the police that Al came to see me tonight."

"Which makes it pure and simple blackmail," Shayne pointed out angrily.

"What do we care what it is. I'm willing to pay . . . anything."

"If it will do us any real good. We've still got the problem of the missing body. I haven't told you about that, Carla. We're still on thin ice even if this man can be shut up. You see, Al's body is riding around town right now, locked up in the trunk of a Ford belonging to Al's brother-in-law and still wrapped in the hotel blanket. The police know I was driving the car tonight, and as soon as the body is discovered they're going to be on my neck."

"Did you say Al's brother-in-law?"

"Yes. Did you know he had a sister living in Miami?"

"I knew there were a couple of sisters, but I didn't know them or where they lived."

"One bit of information I picked up tonight that might have some bearing on the picture is that Al

has recently been mixed up in some sort of crime and is probably wanted by the police. You don't know anything about that, I suppose?"

"How could I? I told you I haven't heard a word about him for years."

Shayne muttered, "I know you told me that. It just occurred to me you might be holding something back. Don't do it, Carla. If I'm going to go on helping you I've got to know exactly where I stand."

She lifted her chin and met his steady, probing gaze unflinchingly. "Every word I've told you is the truth, Mike. I'm not surprised if Al is in trouble with the law. If he's a fugitive, won't that . . . help some when his body is found? I mean, won't the police be more inclined to say good riddance and not work too hard to find out who shot him?"

"That's partially true," Shayne agreed. "However, it doesn't change anything too much. What I was thinking, Carla, is about this man who called you. Did he seem to assume that you were close to Al . . . that you were aware of his current situation? In other words, thinking back on the telephone conversation and knowing, now, that Al is in some very recent and very bad trouble with the law. Is it your impression that this man thought you knew about it, and that he may be an accomplice or something?"

"I honestly don't know how to answer that, Mike. He sounded very much as though he thought I knew exactly what he had to sell me, and as though I should be very glad to buy it for ten thousand dollars. I just didn't know how to answer him." She shuddered openly and drank the last of the small amount of liquor she had poured into her glass.

"What do all these questions matter now?" she poured out passionately as she set the glass down hard on the table. "Our only concern is Vicky . . . and keeping her out of this. If we can manage that by paying him off . . . isn't that worthwhile?"

"We're both in the middle of it along with Vicky," Shayne reminded her soberly. "If the truth about tonight's shenanigans over comes out into the open, you and I are both subject to very serious charges."

"All the more reason for hushing it up if we can," she cried out excitedly. "Look!" She snatched up her handbag and extracted a leather wallet which she opened and from which she extracted a sheaf of bills. She spread them out on the table in front of him. Nine hundred-dollar bills, a fifty, two twenties, and a ten. There were a few other twenties and tens which she separated from the others and put back into her wallet.

"There's an even thousand, Mike," she breathed, pushing the

pile of bills toward him. "That's practically all the cash I brought with me. Take it. And I'll give you an IOU for the other nine thousand. Please don't argue about it any more. Have you got a blank sheet of paper?" She scrabbled inside her bag, came up with a ball-point pen and looked at him hopefully.

Keeping his gaunt face expressionless, Shayne opened the center drawer of the table and pulled out a blank sheet of writing paper. She pulled it toward her and scribbled on it: "Mike Shayne. I O U Nine Thousand Dollars (\$9,000.00). Payable on demand." And she signed it, "Carla Andrews."

"There," she breathed, pushing it toward him. "Will you please get the rest of the money in cash, Mike?"

Shayne carefully folded the bills comprising her thousand dollars lengthwise, and picked up her signed IOU. He studied it for a moment, then folded it around the bills and put the small packet in his pocket.

"All right, Carla. Much as I dislike blackmail—" He shrugged his broad shoulders with a grimace of repugnance, and then looked at his watch. "How long ago was it when this character telephoned you?"

"It seems like a long time. It was . . . something after one o'clock, I know. About one-thirty
(Please turn to page 120)



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or a quarter of two, I'd say. I left the hotel and came straight here."

Shayne said briskly, "It's almost two-thirty now. He should be calling you pretty soon." He hesitated, frowning down at the floor. "When you gave him this number, you didn't tell him it was my phone, did you?"

"No. I just said I was going to see a friend who might help me get the money. I thought maybe it would be better if he didn't know I was coming straight to you."

Shayne nodded. "You were probably right. When he calls, you answer the phone. Just tell him you're with a friend who's getting the money together for you, and turn it over to me. I'll arrange to meet him somewhere and give him the cash."

"Can you get it all right? At this time of night?"

Shayne said, "I can get it. Right now I'm more worried about the Ford that's rolling around town with your husband's body in the trunk than I am about this other deal. Fixing one still isn't going to fix the other."

"Oh?" She looked quite dismayed, then said faintly, "I see! Have you thought of any way—"

Shayne shook his red head wearily. "I'm hoping the brother-in-law will come to me. Otherwise, I've got to try and get my hands on that Ford somehow!"

He was interrupted by the ringing of the telephone. He instinctively reached a hand out for it, then checked himself and nodded to her. "You take it and see if it's your man."

Fearfully, she lifted the receiver and said, "Hello," into the mouthpiece. Watching her while she listened, Shayne saw the strained look fade from her face. "Yes," she said briskly. "I've got everything arranged. My friend, Mr. Jones, is helping me get the money. Why don't you talk to him and fix things between you?"

She lifted her head and thrust the instrument at Shayne. "He wants to know when and where you'll make the pay-off."

Shayne took it and said drily, "Jones speaking."

He stiffened as he recognized the voice that came over the wire. It was George Duclos, whom he had heard talking with Sergeant Loomis at police headquarters:

"You got the money, huh? In cash?"

Shayne said, "I'm getting it together. It takes a little time at two thirty in the morning. I'll have all of it ready in . . . oh, half an hour."

"Ten thousand. Right?"

Shayne said, "Right. Where do I deliver it?"

"I been thinking about that. This is on the up-and-up, huh? No angles. No cops?"

"No angles and no cops," Shayne assured the man. "You set it up to suit yourself."

"Fair enough. Half an hour, huh?"

"Make it three-quarters," Shayne hedged. "I'm still waiting to get my hands on the last two grand."

"Okay. Forty-five minutes. You come alone with the money. Northwest sixty-fourth Terrace where it dead-ends against the Bay. You got that?"

Shayne said, "I've got it." He looked at his watch. "In exactly forty-five minutes. The east end of bayfront. I expect you to be alone, too."

"Sure. This is a strictly private deal, Jones." Duclos chuckled nervously. "You don't bring the money . . . tell the dame she's S. O. L."

Shayne said, "I'll tell her," and hung up. He looked across with a reassuring nod at the woman who was leaning toward him eagerly.

"Everything's okay. All I've got to do is deliver ten grand to him in three-quarters of an hour."

"Can you get the rest of it together, Mike? In that short time?"

"No trouble at all." He waved a big hand reassuringly. "Relax. Take another drink now. Everything's going to be okay."

"I don't think I want a drink right now," she said tremulously. She got to her feet, smoothing down her dress self-consciously. "Could I go to the little girl's room?"

Shayne said, "The bathroom's

right there." He pointed to a closed door at the back next to the bedroom, and sat rigidly with his forehead furrowed while she went inside and closed the door tightly behind her.

Then he leaned forward and picked up her handbag where she had left it sitting beside her chair, unsnapped it and hurriedly rummaged inside.

His hand came out holding a hotel room key with a metal tag attached and the number 810 stamped on it. He dropped it into his pocket, closed the bag and replaced it on the floor where it had been.

When Carla Andrews came out of the bathroom, he was leaning back blandly smoking a cigarette and studying the ceiling through the blue smoke that twirled upward.

She sat down diffidently in her chair and hesitated, and then said in a small voice, "Forty-five minutes isn't very much time, Mike . . . if you're going to get all that money together."

He grinned at her and said, "I made a telephone call while you were in the bathroom. I'm expecting a call back . . . and everything will be set."

She said, "Oh," and then happily, "I guess I will have another little drink before I go."

Shayne said, "Sure. Make it a big one if you like. Nothing for you to worry about now." He hes-

itated and added thoughtfully, "I think you'd better sit tight right here, Carla, while I make this contact. I don't expect anything to go wrong, but you'd better be here where I can reach you if anything does. Keep Vicky out of it altogether. She's been through enough as it is."

She said, "All right. But you will let me know?"

"I'll come straight back." He looked at his watch and muttered, "I expected a call right back."

At that instant his telephone rang. He grabbed it up and said, "Mike Shayne," into the mouth-piece.

As he had expected, Timothy Rourke's voice came over the wire, bubbling with exultancy, "Got it, Mike. Hit it on the head, by God. Our boy is really on the wanted list. Want me to give it to you over the phone?"

"No. I'd rather stop by and pick it up," Shayne told him. "You've got all of it, huh?"

"Plenty."

"Fine. Where'll I meet you in ten minutes?"

"How about my place, Mike?

I'm at the office now, but I'm bushed."

"Right. I'll be along in about ten minutes."

Shayne hung up and said, "That was easy. He's got the whole nine grand waiting. All I have to do is pick it up and deliver it to your friend. I should be back here inside if an hour."

He got up as he spoke, opened a drawer of the table and lifted out a short-barrelled .38 which he dropped into a side pocket.

She watched him with wide, troubled eyes and said fearfully, "Do you think there's any danger?"

"It's always dangerous to make a deal with a blackmailer. Don't worry. I can take care of myself."

"I know you can." She got up swiftly and pressed herself close against him, looking up into his face with shining eyes and parted lips. "I'll be waiting right here for you, Mike. I'll be praying to God that nothing goes wrong."

Shayne lowered his head and kissed her lips firmly. "Leave everything to me and don't worry." He patted her shoulder, grabbed up his Panama and hurried out.

(To Be Continued)

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**It was the tiniest of clues . . .
But it pinpointed a killer.**



BLOOD CLOCKS

by

**ARTHUR
PORGES**

LIEUTENANT AJAX had been to Europe on a leave of absence. His purpose: to study police methods abroad. Luckily, or perhaps with kindness aforethought, he didn't tell his successor that John Holland, Chief Pathologist at Pasteur Hospital, was available to correct the endless bungling of the official coroner. So for twelve months

I was able to do the work I was paid for, without the alarms and excursions of murder, arson, and robbery.

Not that I remained quite at ease all this time. I kept seeing a procession of innocent people being executed or imprisoned because Ajax wasn't around to consult me when he was seriously

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baffled. Of less concern to me was the equally likely prospect of murderers going scot-free in exultant platoons.

In answer to my polite query about his trip Ajax said: "The British police are tops—absolutely the most competent soft-sellers in the business. The criminal can never complain of brutality or crudity, but a velvet hand, sure as death, never fails to adjust the noose. They are tough on sentencing, but they lower the boom so politely that the crook feels like apologizing for causing trouble."

"And France?"

"Well," Ajax said thoughtfully, "they are good, scientific workers, but not worried about the rights of the accused. If you're innocent, and circumstances are not entirely in your favor, I'd suggest demanding trial by combat, or the old medieval stunt of putting your hand in boiling water. Otherwise, you're not going to convince a French court."

"Your great concern with the plight of the innocent is not accidental, I'm afraid," I told him apprehensively.

He grinned in a sheepish way. "Oh, all right. You guessed it. I fell right into a case. If you listen with the third ear you'll hear me yelling for help. Right at the moment my soft underbelly is exposed. Are you going to kick it, or be a good citizen?"

"You don't have to beat around

the bush," I said. "I've had a year's vacation, just like you. Always glad to help—once a year! What's the problem?"

"It happened yesterday—the day after I returned to duty," he said. "How do you like that? Rich old gal murdered. Chief suspect her nephew, a made-to-order loser. When he was twenty-two, the kid joined the Communist Party. Five years of that, and he got fed up. Went extremely religious. Two more years, and he tired of that, too. He became a lay missionary, and went to Africa.

"As you can see, a really unstable type. When he turned Communist, his aunt disowned him. After he got religion, she reinstated him as her chief heir. Now he's back from Africa and wants to build a big hospital with her money. She doesn't like the idea, and they quarrel. For two weeks, on and off, they quarrel.

"Then she's found dead. Inference: he killed her for her money. Only he doesn't get any, because she changed her will a few days earlier. Unfortunately for him he didn't know it, so the motive's still good." Ajax paused for breath, while I admired his ability to deliver so meaty a precis.

"That's all you have? Circumstantial evidence?"

"Not quite. The big clincher is that we found blood at the scene of the crime. Admittedly his. He claims he tripped and hit his head

while leaving his aunt's house. That was about eleven at night."

"And when was she killed?"

"Almost certainly early the next morning—between seven and eighty-thirty."

"So if he really left at eleven, and didn't come back, he's in the clear."

"Right. But he can't prove it. No alibi for the time from when he left to when she was killed—strangled."

"But you think he's innocent."

"I do," Ajax said. "He's a crazy, unbalanced type, but very idealistic, and definitely against violence. Peace marcher, ban-the-bomb-er. That sort of thing."

"Any other good suspects?" I asked.

"Just one. The woman's protege—a young artist named Harry Ward. She disinherited her nephew in his favor. He denied knowing anything about the new will, but we've only his word for that."

"Which you don't accept."

"I didn't say that. It's just that I've had a lot of experience judging character, and of the two men I can't help feeling that Ward is more capable of murder by violence than the nephew, Leonard Purdy."

"What do you expect me to do?"

Ajax looked foolish. "We know it's Purdy's blood—I brought you some."

I blinked. "Why?"

"I don't know," he snapped. "Hell, it's all I've got."

He was obviously unhappy, so I didn't say what I was thinking. Instead I said mildly: "He said it was his blood. Fine. Did you check that?"

"It's the same type. I verified that at least. What else *could* I do? Besides, why would he lie? It's a question of *when* he spilled it. Naturally, after a few hours all blood clots, and there's no way of telling just how old it is."

"Yes, I know," I said, my voice quite expressionless, and Ajax had the decency to flush.

He held out a little vial, but I could see that there was nothing for me. The usual tiny clot in a few drops of colorless plasma. Still, I accepted it, and put it aside. There was only one thing I could do that made any sense at all. No pathologist in the world can tell how old blood is once the stuff has had a few hours to clot and start decomposing.

"I'd like to look over the place where she was killed," I told Ajax.

Even if this blood was useless, there was always the off chance I might spot something else. Not that Ajax missed much, but my sights were set differently.

"Fine," he agreed, and I could see hope springing to life in his official breast.

"Mind you, I can't promise a thing. There's no clock in the blood."

"Forget the apologies," he said.
"Let's go."

The old lady—a Mrs. Lorraine Calkin, by the way—lived in a ramshackle old mansion of the type that would have delighted Harriet Beecher Stowe, but not Claire Boothe Luce. The sitting room, where she had been killed, didn't have much to offer.

Ajax showed me a projecting board, and said: "He says he tripped over that, and hit his head by the base of that heater."

I stooped, and took a good look. There was a discolored patch on the floor. I could even see where Ajax had removed his laboratory sample of the clotted blood.

I was about to look elsewhere, when I spotted another stain on the heater itself. It was about the size of a dime, and just above the floor.

"Was this gas heater on?" I asked Ajax.

"It had been, most of the night," he replied. "When she was found it was still going, with a small fire. But she ran it day and night this time of the year. You know how old people are when it gets to be chilly weather."

I took my little aplanatic pocket lens out, and studied the stain. It was quite suggestive. Not that it told me anything at the moment—except that, purely by accident, a tiny splash of blood had been treated almost as if for a microscopic slide: that is, spread on a

heated surface, and dried in a thin film.

I had no idea what it might tell me later on—possibly nothing. But the preparation seemed to beg for an examination. So with my pocket knife I peeled the film off, and put it on a bit of clean paper, which I then folded carefully.

"Got something?" Ajax demanded, his eyes bright.

"Just more blood," I said hastily, not wanting him to get his hopes up over nothing.

"But you must have a reason for taking more," he persisted.

"My only reason is that this patch was dried while fresh, and so is in good shape to examine. But what I'm examining it for I don't know—so help me!"

He grunted, but I could see he didn't believe me, and was expecting some kind of a miracle.

After that, I went over the rest of the room again, but found the same big blank.

"She was strangled with a scarf," Ajax said, watching me.

I knew what he wanted. "I'll do the autopsy," I said. "Unless Colton's already botched it." He's the Coroner, a guy who should be dissecting meat for a supermarket.

"Nobody's worked on her yet," Ajax said. "Just a preliminary finding about the strangulation, which was very obvious even to me."

"It's those obvious ones you have to watch," I said sourly. But

it isn't so, really. In nine hundred and ninety-nine cases out of a thousand, the apparent cause of death is it, period.

AND THAT'S HOW it was this time—a simple case of strangulation with a scarf. Anybody could have done it; the woman was old, with a thin and flaccid neck. I told Ajax as much.

"I don't think Purdy's the one," he said for the twentieth time. "A wild-eyed idealist fanatic, but not a brutal killer."

"I can't help you," I said. "This is one time I must be a big disappointment. But you can't make bricks without straw."

"So I've heard for years," he said irritably. "But I still have no idea what part straw plays in the process, and I don't give a damn, either! What about that blood sample—both of them?"

"I'll check 'em over," I said, trying not to look guilty.

"Please do," he said, his voice heavily ironical.

"I'll try not to miss all the little alarm clocks," I said. "Why do you always ask for the impossible?"

"Maybe because you did it now and then—when you were in your prime years ago."

He was in my lab, so I said: "Service while you wait. Let me get that dry film under the microscope, and we'll see."

I teased the bit of dried blood-

film onto a slide and, determined to go all out, did some tricky staining as well. That is, I added certain dyes to bring out details.

I took a good look, and must have registered surprise, because Ajax came over in practically one leap.

"What is it?" he snapped.

"Give me time for the message to get from my eyes to my brain!" I snapped right back. "How do I know what it is—or isn't."

But I did know. The shapes were unmistakable. Purdy had picked up a disease in Africa and his blood had some of those nasty parasites known as filarian worms. There are many kinds; the best known are those that cause elephantiasis—that messy ailment that gives some Africans hugely swelled thighs and legs.

Now I'm no expert on tropical diseases. But we have a fine medical library at Pasteur, and while I had practically lost interest in the case by now, I was very much intrigued by the parasites. How Purdy got into the country with them I don't know. But it's not often doctors in this country get a chance to see such worms. I intended to profit by the goofing of the health authorities.

A search of the literature soon identified these as Bancroftian organisms. As I read on, I began to feel a stir of excitement. Talk about alarm clocks in the blood! These beasties lived in the lymph

glands, but entered the blood in great quantities at certain hours: to be precise, from ten P. M. to two A. M. The implications were obvious.

I studied the sample again. According to Purdy, this blood had been spilled at eleven P. M. In that case, there should have been a heavy concentration of the parasites in his blood. But my specimen showed only a very few. Conclusion: the blood was spilled while the worms were in the lymph glands, and Purdy had lied about the time.

I discussed my theory with Ajax, and he shook his head in wonder. He also seemed skeptical, and that made me a little angry.

"All right," I said. "Get a sample of his blood tomorrow at night—say eleven—and if it isn't full of the worms I'll turn butcher myself."

Well, he got the sample. Purdy

was uneasy, but unwilling to refuse cooperation for obvious reasons. And his blood was loaded with *Wuchereria bancrofti*, the filarian worms that cause the disease.

"I should have remembered," Ajax said later, disgusted with himself, "that while an idealist won't kill for himself, he'll kill in a hurry for an idea—in this case, the idea of a hospital for the African poor."

"And I should have remembered that some living things *do* act like alarm clocks," I said. "Even though I had no reason to expect any of them in Purdy's circulation. If you hadn't prodded me into examining that blood, a pointless, silly test—"

"Brains and logic I ain't got," Ajax lied cheerfully, "but when it comes to instinct, and riding your back—there I really got it in spades!"



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